



NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, Issue 6: March 26, 2021

Message from School Committee Chair, Chub Whitten

Happy Spring!

Once again, we are called upon to shift, modify and adapt to welcome our students back to in person learning.

It will take a total team effort of the entire district community to accomplish this goal. This involves surveying our parent community, gathering consensus from our educators, and unpacking furniture and erecting tents with our facilities department. Our administrative team has been busy planning and will now assist in executing a reopening plan.

One significant change from our Hybrid model will be how we treat the remote option. While still maintaining this choice, students will be restricted in their ability to zoom in to classes if they have chosen the in person learning method. Please note that remote quarantine instruction due to travel will no longer be allowed.

I'm hopeful that we are all able to take some positives from this historic period; even greater family connections, innovative online learning techniques, and outdoor learning to name a few.

With the season change we must also celebrate and recognize the significant contributions that Finance Director Joanne Cuff, Doyon Principal Sheila Halloran, and Winthrop Principal Sheila McAdams have made to our District. Between them, they gave 64 years to the service of our district. We wish them well in their retirement and are grateful for their commitment. They will have a lasting influence as we look to the future.

The Principal positions have been posted and applications are beginning to be collected. A search committee is being formed that will consist of; 2 school committee members, 4 parents, 4 educators, and 1 principal. This is an expanded group as we are hiring both principals with one application process.

Finally, it is great to see so many vaccinations getting in the arms of our educators and staff. Although it has been determined by the Commonwealth that vaccines are not a requirement for fully reopening, I am appreciative we are coming back with this added protection.

Thank you all for all your sacrifices and hard work,

Chub Whitten

Updates: Return to Learn 2020-2021

With the recent decision by Gov. Baker to return to full in-person learning, Ipswich Public schools are making preparations. Our educators and staff have been getting vaccinated and a survey went out to school families to ask if their students would be returning to the classroom or continuing remote learning for the remainder of the school year. At all schools, prevention strategies will remain the same as far as mask wearing and hygiene, with the only change being 3 foot spacing between students instead of 6, in accordance with CDC and DESE guidelines.

Both elementary schools will begin regular, 5-day a week instruction on Monday, April 5th. Next week, Cohort A will be in school on Monday and Tuesday (March 29th and 30th), and Wednesday (March 31st) will be a remote day for all elementary students, as usual. On Thursday Cohort B will attend school. On Friday, April 2nd all elementary students will have no school as teachers prepare their classrooms for their returning students. Middle and High School schedules will remain as they currently are until after April vacation.

At the Middle and High schools, all students will have the Monday following April vacation off to allow their teachers time to prepare for their return to full in-person learning on Tuesday, April 27th.

We expect to have early release days on Wednesdays for the rest of the school year, which will return to the usual Thursdays in September. One additional change will be that remote instruction will no longer be an option for students who have returned to the classroom. If a child is absent due to illness or travel, their missed work may be picked up from school and they will have the usual amount of time to make up missed work.

As always, it is critical that all parents reinforce the importance of social distancing and mask wearing with their children. The Ipswich Public schools continue to request that students returning from any travel out of state for more than 24 hours produce a negative test or quarantine before returning to school in adherence with the [Governor's COVID-19 Travel Advisory](#). Students who have been fully vaccinated and are without symptoms are exempt from this.

Updates to the District's Return to Learn Plan have been compiled into an Addendum to reflect changes and revised guidance from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the MA Department of Public Health. You can find the Addendum on the District's website. Additional addendums will be published as circumstances change and new information becomes available.

Budget Overview

February and March are busy months for the Central Office and School Committee as we work to pull together a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Scenarios are reviewed and discussed in meetings between the Superintendent and School administrators before being presented to the Budget Subcommittee, full School Committee and ultimately the Finance Committee for their support. A popular topic of discussion during these meetings is the “stabilization fund”. How exactly does the stabilization fund work and why is it important?

The costs associated with running our school district increase at an average annual rate of about 4.25% driven largely by costs associated with salaries and fixed costs. Revenue increases available to the Town via Proposition 2 ½ and new growth average around 3.1% each year. Without a solution to cover this shortfall (which only compounds each fiscal year), our schools would have to cut services and staffing annually.

In 2015, taxpayers approved an operational override thereby giving the Schools an additional \$2.9 million per year in funding. These funds were critical to our district and allowed the schools to add back programs and services that were cut the previous year when an override request failed. In the initial years after the override was passed, surplus revenue over and above what was needed to cover the school budget were allocated to a stabilization fund. In subsequent years, as costs grow at a rate that exceeds increases in tax revenue, the schools draw from that surplus to support the budget. Unfortunately, a stabilization fund doesn't last forever and must be replenished at some point in time. The 2015 override was projected to provide support to the schools for 5 years. Through sound planning and management by our Central office and school administrators, the 2021-2022 school year will be the 7th year of the override. Our current projections show us extending the override for an 8th year.

The stabilization fund has been a vital planning tool for our school district. It gives our administrators and educators the ability to provide a robust and dynamic curriculum but also helps our district meet the cost uncertainties that come up each year.

The School Committee encourages all parents to reach out to us with any questions related to the school budget or any other school related topics.

Ipswich Education Foundation (IEF)

Ipswich Education Foundation (IEF) is a nonprofit organization that serves as a central fundraising and advocacy group for the Ipswich schools. For the next few newsletters we will spotlight groups that IEF supports, starting with the GreenTeams (4th-12th grades). The Ipswich GreenTeams aren't letting the pandemic get them down - they're working full STEAM ahead on

many initiatives in the areas of Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community. A sampling of their current initiatives include:

- ❖ Hello Neighbor fridges in 3 locations around town to combat food insecurity and ensure all Ipswich residents have access to free, healthy food
- ❖ Funding the first \$5,000 sustainability Scholarship to a graduating senior
- ❖ GreenTeam students authoring an upcoming editorial about the Ipswich Zero Carbon Resolution
- ❖ Fourth season of the Generation Growers garden
- ❖ Collaboration between Green Team students and New England Biolabs in the engineering and architectural design phase of a new daycare facility on the Biolabs campus, with the goal of achieving Leed or Passive House Standards for the new building.

High School Sports

Winter sports at the High School were able to carry on in spite of the pandemic. The girls basketball team ended the season with a record of 5-6 and made it to the Cape Ann League tournament finals. The boys team finished 6-5 and also made it to the finals of the CAL tournament. Players, coaches and parents are all thankful for the chance to compete and add some “normalcy” to this school year.

The Fall 2 sports season is in full swing at the High School! Football, volleyball and indoor track began practicing in late February. Their seasons will continue through April 25. At this point, access for fans to view the live competitions is limited to parents and siblings. Football and Volleyball games are broadcast live on Ipswich Athletics page on Facebook. Please support our student athletes as they try to make the best of a very challenging school year!

School Facilities Working Group

The School Facilities Working Group has been meeting regularly to discuss the process we should follow to determine the best approach to meet our elementary school building needs. We had a preliminary call with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) in late January to discuss next steps and answer some key questions. They suggested Amherst, MA as an example of a community who has successfully been re-accepted into the MSBA pipeline after a failed project. We had a productive phone call with key players in Amherst in mid-February to learn about their process and timeline. We were heartened to hear they had come together as a community and are moving forward with a proposal on a compromised project that will benefit all of their elementary students and staff.

We plan on having a working session with the entire Ipswich School Committee in April to discuss Committee priorities, the process, and a timeline for our community that fits in with the Town-wide Strategic Plan. As a School Committee we are dedicated to making the elementary school building project transparent, collaborative, and inclusive. Our belief is that we can come together, listen to each other, and arrive at a solution that will benefit all of our students and staff as well as the broader community.

School Committee Meeting Highlights

February

- FY22 Budget Presentation to the School Committee
- Strategic Plan resolution vote
- Public hearing: FY22 school budget

March

- High School Winter Sports Awards
- Discussion of forming committees to hire new Elementary Principals/Director of Finance
- Capital Plan review
- School facilities discussion

Upcoming District Events

- **April 1:** School Committee Open Session Meeting*
- **April 7:** All Town Band
- **April 15:** School Committee Open Session Meeting*
- **April 19-23:** No School - April Break
- **May 7-9:** High School Musical - Mamma Mia!
- **May 15:** Annual Town Meeting
- **May 24-28:** 4th Annual STEAM Showcase (Virtual)

* 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 ICAM. To view these meetings, please tune into Comcast Channel 98 and Verizon Channel 31. Meetings can also be viewed on the ICAM Ipswich website: www.icamipswich.com. On March 12, 2020, Governor Baker issued an executive order suspending certain provisions to the Open Meeting Law, to enable public bodies to carry out their responsibilities while adhering to public health recommendations regarding social distancing. As such, while the School Committee members meet in person in the MS/HS Ensemble Room, these meetings are simultaneously held over Zoom to ensure real-time public access.

Contact Information

schoolcommittee@ipswichma.gov

Chub Whitten, Chair: cwhitten@ipsk12.net

Carl Nylen, Vice Chair: cnylen@ipsk12.net

Emily Cannon: ecannon@ipsk12.net

Kate Eliot: keliot@ipsk12.net

Pavica Kneedler: pkneedler@ipsk12.net

Hugh O’Flynn: hoflynn@ipsk12.net

Greg Stevens: gstevens@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](#)