



## **Message from School Committee Chair, Chub Whitten**

Arriving at the Middle School/High School campus last week to drop off my daughter for field hockey practice, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for all who have made the opening of our school year possible. The parking lot was full of cars, the weather was cooperating, and students and staff (distantly separated) were busy with their tasks at hand. The positive energy of our school community was palpable on that sparkling fall afternoon. That moment would not have been possible without the total commitment of our teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents working together.

I recognize that not everything in our district has gone as smoothly as that afternoon; however, I am also cognizant that we are all working together towards solutions when we encounter challenges in our process. I am hopeful that we will all have the patience to persist until the desired outcomes are met. I have come to realize that synchronous teaching and learning is very hard work for all. While the students in my family greatly prefer their days in school versus the hours in their rooms on Zoom, their acceptance of this temporary hybrid learning platform makes them part of the execution strategy. Through my children's experiences, I have come to appreciate the huge adjustment teachers have made to deliver their lesson plans every day to not only the students in front of them, but the ones on their screens as well. At the end of our recent days, all are exhausted but thankful to achieve our common goals.

As our season begins to cool and the days become shorter, we must all remain vigilant and focus on the priority of keeping our community healthy. I am thankful for the commitment of our local Department of Public Health and our school healthcare staff for their close working relationship. We witnessed the wheels in motion with a recent transgression of a few that could have potentially jeopardized our reopening model. Errors in judgment were quickly recognized, and an action plan (with testing) was immediately implemented.

These days it is particularly important to speak up when all is not right, whether that may be with your student's daily experience in the buildings or an interaction outside of school. The pandemic may mean keeping a child at home with minor seasonal symptoms, declining an invitation to gather socially outside of school, and putting the needs of our collective community above our own.

The District community is standing by ready, willing and able to tackle what this virus throws our way. I remain grateful for all of the work all have given.

Thank You,  
Chub Whitten

## **A Special Thank You from the Ipswich School Committee**

Grateful. Exhausted. Happy. Stressed. Joyous. Overwhelmed. These are some of the adjectives that we've been hearing from our Ipswich staff, students, and families over these first three weeks of the 2020-21 school year. This tumultuous mix of emotions seems to churn, in varying degrees, within all of us as we do our best to adjust to a far-from-typical learning environment. Recognizing this, we as the Ipswich School Committee would like to take the time to express our deep appreciation.

**THANK YOU:** to our teachers, administrators, aides, custodians, counselors, food service employees, and all of the other wonderful staff members of the Ipswich Public School. We know that you are working harder than ever before. We see you implementing creative, out-of-the box solutions to problems that didn't exist six months ago. You rise to the new, unanticipated challenges that pop up like a game of whack-a-mole. We also see that even though you are thrilled to reconnect with your students, this past month has required you to function at an often exhausting pace. Our hope is that routines and rhythms will begin to shift and settle as we move into October. Please know that you have the support and gratitude of the School Committee, and we ask the community at large to join us in thanking you for your above-and-beyond dedication to the schoolchildren of Ipswich.

**THANK YOU:** to our students. You have shown resilience and fortitude in the face of what will probably (hopefully!) be the most unusual school year of your lives. It is certainly not easy to transition back to a school setting after such a long hiatus - especially with all of the new rules to remember, the health and safety protocols, and trying to juggle hybrid and remote learning. Our counselors have reported an increased amount of anxiety and stress in students. Please don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it! Your teachers, counselors, and families are here to assist you navigate through these uncharted waters. Thank you, from all of us. Your willingness to adapt, learn, and grow is the inspiration that fuels our efforts.

**THANK YOU:** to our families. A recent online meme making the rounds joked that reading all of the emails from your child's school district has become a full-time job...and here we are again, sending another one. Yet we also realize that this increased communication ironically doesn't always answer all of your questions. Please know that the amount of work being done behind the scenes is absolutely monumental. We recognize that you, too, have taken on a huge amount of extra effort at home to support your child's education, and we thank you for your continued patience and understanding as we do our best to make the best of this school year.

And lastly, **THANK YOU:** to our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Brian Blake. While the start to our school year has of course had some bumps, we look to the turmoil in many other communities and are extremely proud and thankful that Ipswich has been able to successfully bring students back into the school buildings. The fall reopening plans, which required attention over an almost innumerable amount of moving targets and parts, would not have been possible without your leadership. Thank you.

With appreciation and admiration,

The Ipswich School Committee

Chub Whitten, Carl Nylén, Hugh O'Flynn, Pavica Kneedler, Sara Gilliam, Greg Stevens, and Emily Cannon.

## **Updates: Return to Learn 2020**

Updates to the District's Return to Learn Plan have been compiled into an Addendum to reflect recent 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; <https://www.ipsk12.net/cms/lib/MA02212674/Centricity/ModuleInstance/1626/Return%20To%20Learn%20Update%201.%209%2011%202020.pdf>. Additional addendums will be published as circumstances change and new information becomes available.

## **Strategic Planning Group and the Future of Ipswich**

We are all well aware of the various infrastructure and building projects that need to be addressed in Ipswich. In 2019, the Strategic Planning Group was created to provide residents of our town with a variety of planning scenarios and the costs associated with each. This group has representatives from each of the Town boards along with all Town department heads who are directly involved in the oversight and management of our Town facilities. The primary goal of this group is to “develop a cost projection and investment model for key infrastructure developments in Ipswich”. These projects run the gamut from a new Public Safety building (initial stages to be voted on at the Special Town Meeting later this month) to a major rehabilitation of the water and electrical infrastructure. Also included in the analysis is the construction of a new elementary school(s) and overrides to support the operations of our schools for years to come. As residents and taxpayers, it is critically important that we all take the time to understand the needs and associated costs of all of these important and necessary projects. There was a great deal of information covered on this topic at the September 2nd Tri-board meeting (available to watch on the ICAM website in their video archives). The presentation itself is available on the Town website under this link:

<https://www.ipswichma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12511/09-02-2020-Tri-Board-Meeting-Packet?bidId=>

## **Race, Equity, and Social Justice Working Group**

This year, the School Committee has created a Race, Equity, and Social Justice Working Group in response to recent events in our country that are tragic and poignant reminders of the needs to empower and validate diverse backgrounds, and to support educational environments that investigate societal norms. The initial focus of this working group is to solicit feedback from our community of educators, learners and parents on their experience with issues surrounding race, equity and social justice both in the schools and community. This information will be used to inform our group's goals and objectives for the year and as a lens to help guide policy revision recommendations. This working group is open to all members of the community. Please keep an eye out for more information on this important work in the coming weeks.

# School Committee Meeting Highlights

## August

- Fall Reopening Updates and Discussions
- Election of Chub Whitten as Chair and Carl Nylen as Vice Chair; Subcommittee Assignments
- Adoption of 2020-21 Memorandum of Understanding with the Ipswich Educators Association
- Annual Retreat to discuss 2020-21 School Committee Goals

## September

- Tri Board Meeting Review of Strategic Working Group presentation
- Return to Learn Update
- School Reopening and Athletics Updates
- Special Town Meeting Warrant Article Discussion and Vote

## Upcoming District Events

- **October 12:** No School; Holiday
- **October 14:** No School; Professional Development for Staff
- **October 15:** School Committee Open Session Meeting\*
- **October 17:** Special Town Meeting, 9:00 a.m. on the fields at the middle/high school
- **November 5:** 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, 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](http://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

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