



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

A recent Education Week article states: “Teachers are always, in a sense, the nation’s first responders to world historical developments.”

This is certainly true when reflecting on the lens of the events of January 6. Our administrators have: “encouraged teachers to hold balanced respectful discussions about last week’s events in Washington so that their voices were heard and that we valued their opinions and feelings about what they saw on TV.”

Current events, while sometimes difficult to convey, are an important part of our student’s curriculum throughout all grades and follow state standards for History and Social Studies education. I think it is fair to say that these recent times will be a moment in history that all of us will remember and perhaps shape our collective thinking, actions, and beliefs in the future. From my experience of my children’s classroom, I continue to appreciate and remain grateful that we have a dedicated teacher corps that continues to deliver an excellent daily lesson plan to our most treasured assets.

Of course everyone in our school district is existing under an incredible amount of stress because of our global pandemic. We now have the highest positivity rates of any time since COVID-19 arrived in Ipswich. What all of us witness is a constant collaboration of everyone in our community to follow protocols and keep this virus at bay so we may continue to educate and keep all safe to the best of our abilities.

With each suspension of regular events, I am constantly amazed at the resilience of all to find a path to growth. I also recognize that, as we go further down the road of isolation, it is taking a social and emotional toll on students, parents, teachers, and administrators. We all look forward to an effective vaccine that will free us from the chains of this pandemic. It is my hope that our staff and teachers are the next up to receive a vaccine.

Even while we modify, cancel, and adapt our offerings we are beginning to plan. The next few weeks mark the planning and execution of next year’s school budget. Starting with presentations by each building Principal, our future budget is beginning to form. Please stay involved in the formative part of this process as we begin to build back programs for our students next year.

We must all remain hyper focused and vigilant to prevent the further spread of this virus. I want to thank everyone in our community for doing their part.

Be well and stay safe.

Thanks,

Chub Whitten

## Updates: Return to Learn 2020-2021

With the recent uptick in new COVID-19 cases, it is critical that all parents reinforce the importance of social distancing and mask wearing with their children. Please keep in mind that returning from any travel out of state (even just for the day) requires adherence to the [Governor's COVID-19 Travel Order](#). Students must either switch to full remote, produce a negative test or quarantine before returning to school.

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.

The Nimble Systems Committee has developed and published a [Remote Learning Handbook](#) as a resource for parents and students in the event the district and individual family moves to a remote learning model. The handbook contains expectations for remote learning, resources for parents and students, as well as other helpful information should the need arise to move to a remote model.

## School Budget

Budget Season is here again. The building principals and central office are hard at work putting together their proposed budgets for the FY22 school year. Our Budget Subcommittee has had meetings with building administrators and the Superintendent to offer feedback regarding the "needs and wants" of each school within the context of our financial constraints. Ultimately, a final "Superintendent's Budget" will be presented to the School Committee as a whole. A vote will be taken to either accept the budget as presented or request revisions. Upon final approval by the School Committee, the budget moves forward to Finance Committee hearings in March and ultimately to Town Meeting for a vote.

Since the allocation of funds within the school budget has a direct impact on all students in the district, the School Committee encourages parents to join us for the budget presentations on February 3rd and 4th. Dr. Blake and his administration team will walk through the funding requests of the Central Office and each of the 4 schools to give the entire Committee (and the public) an in-depth view of what is being asked for in FY22. These meetings will be streamed live via ZOOM as well as broadcast on [ICAM](#).

Now is the time for parents (and taxpayers) in Ipswich to really tune in and pay attention to the finances supporting our schools. For a variety of reasons, the Ipswich schools face the challenge of consistently operating under a structural deficit. The cost to provide a high quality education to our students increases at a faster rate than the revenues in place to support it. Our schools rely on operational overrides to fill the gap. The last override was approved by voters in 2015 and was originally projected to provide adequate funding through 2020. Due to sound financial management and conservative planning, the override funds have provided our schools with an additional 2 years of support. The School Committee projects that our next operational override request will be presented to taxpayers at the May 2022 Town Meeting. Attending the budget presentations is the first step for

parents to help the School Committee as we begin ramping up our educational campaign to let taxpayers know why an override is critically necessary.

## School Improvement Plans

Each year, building principals along with their respective School Council members discuss what can be done to improve the learning experiences for our students. These plans were presented to the School Committee at meetings in December and January. Among others, topics such as addressing the social/emotional health of students, lessons on social justice and the creation of innovative learning environments were covered. The plans are available to view on the [District website: School Improvement Plans](#).

## Race, Equity, and Social Justice Working Group

The Race Equity & Social Justice Working Group continues moving forward with increased participation from students, parents, educators, the school administration, the Town of Ipswich, Ipswich Police Department, and NAACP. To that end the working group continues conducting Listening Sessions with various groups to hear their perspectives, thoughts and suggestions on how to cultivate an Antiracist community of educators and learners in a way that promotes inclusion and longevity. For now, the goals of the working group are two fold: to create a space for the respectful exchange of ideas and perspective; and to communicate what is learned to the school district administration as they continue their review of the social justice standards. This group continues to meet monthly and posts notice of all upcoming meetings with meeting links on the [District calendar](#).

## School Committee Meeting Highlights

### December

- High School Student-Athlete Fall Sports awards
- Presentation of Open Campus request for Seniors
- Secondary Education Plans presented by Principals
- Secondary School Improvement Plans presented by Principals

### January

- Introduction of Kate Eliot as newest School Committee member
- Elementary School Improvement Plans presented by Principals
- Presentation by Climate Resiliency Committee regarding Zero Carbon Resolution
- Subcommittee reassignments

## Upcoming District Events

- **February 3 and 4:** School Committee Budget Presentations

- **February 15-19:** No School; February Break
- **February 25:** Public Hearing on School District Budget
- **March 9-11:** Finance Committee Budget Hearings re: School budget

\* 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](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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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.

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