



RICHARD L. KORB  
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

# Ipswich Public Schools

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To the Parents and Citizens of Ipswich:

Over the past few weeks, you have been hearing a lot about our school budget. Discussions have been held with the Administration, School Committee, and most recently with the Finance Committee over the pending FY09 school budget crisis. In order to produce a budget which we felt was within available revenue sources, we had to make significant cuts to our original proposed level-services budget. These cuts have been made in staffing, academics, music and art programs, transportation, professional development, technology, library services, as well as textbooks and supplies. The staffing cuts alone will result in increased class sizes that are unacceptable.

Beginning in 2002 we had to address the issue of revenue increasing at a rate far slower than the cost of doing business. From 2002 through 2008 we have had to reduce the budget in all areas. The following are among those cuts: the elimination of the elementary school librarians; decreasing custodial positions district-wide; eliminating musical instrument replacements; cutting the position of the Director of the Performing Arts Center; essentially eliminating professional development for teachers and staff; eliminating middle school French; eliminating high school business courses; greatly reducing technology instruction; reducing the Central Office/Special Education Administrator to part-time; no longer supporting sub-varsity sports within the budget; eliminating the replacement of computers; not replacing teachers who have left which has resulted in increased class sizes K-12; and greatly reducing student transportation services. We have also placed an increased burden on the families of our students by raising fees associated with increased costs of afterschool programs, field trips, athletics, music and testing materials.

Over the years, we have also come to rely on uncertain outside funding to meet essential needs for fuel and utilities, insurance, and student programs. We've been able to restore a few of these cuts by using gifts, grants, Choice revenue and the Feoffees distribution. However, our teacher-student ratio remains inadequate, parents continue to pay expensive fees, programs have not been restored, and we are in danger of losing our reputation as one of the top school systems in the Commonwealth.

One would be correct in asking the question, "If our school budget has been so inadequate, how do we continue to rank amongst the top school districts in the Commonwealth?" There are several reasons. First and foremost, it is because of the dedicated, committed and hardworking teaching and support staff that we have, along with a highly competent team of building principals and business office personnel. Secondly, we have worked together to reduce our expenses in many creative and innovative ways. We continue to create on-site classroom programs to provide services to many special needs children, thus reducing the need to transport these children to out-of-district, expensive placements. In addition, we also continue to collaborate with the Town in the area of joint purchasing, as well as sharing the position of Director of Facilities. Thirdly, we have worked diligently to reduce our energy costs by improving the physical infrastructure of our buildings with new doors, windows, roofs, lighting and boilers. We recently have installed an Energy Management System at the Middle/High School which will result in further savings, as well as having improved the insulation factors and weather-stripping which will result in further savings.

As we look to the future and other creative initiatives, we have developed a partnership with the Town of Ipswich and the Electric Light Department to build a wind turbine on Town Farm Road which could provide enough electricity to the schools, reducing our energy costs by over \$300,000 per year. The schools' contribution towards that project would be \$1.6 million from an interest-free Clean Renewable Energy Bonds (CREBs) loan that we received recently from the federal government.

This now brings us to 2008 and our continuing fiscal dilemma. Ipswich is now facing a situation not unlike other communities in Massachusetts and nation-wide in which costs have simply outstripped our revenues, and outside funding can no longer maintain our basic educational programs. In order to meet the Town's and Commonwealth's available revenue sources, we had to cut over \$867,000 from our projected FY09 budget.

Over the last few weeks, many questions have been posed to me, such as how could I recommend such devastating cuts to teaching staff, libraries, music and art, and other academic programs. Some have even asked me if these decisions were a strategy or "scare tactic" to win support for our schools or an override. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that there is no other way to attempt to balance our budget without cutting more teachers from the classrooms, cutting academic programs, closing libraries, eliminating transportation and cutting support positions such as the School Resource Officer and custodians. The reality is that we are facing a severe structural deficit that has been building for years, and, for each of those years, we have been eating away and nibbling at the edges trying to balance the budget. The reality now is that we have no more edges on which to nibble. We have now reached the point of cutting at the very heart and soul of our educational system.

As your Superintendent of Schools and a resident of this community for over the last ten years, I understand how important a quality educational program and top-notch school system is to

Ipswich. This community has come to expect and deserve nothing but the best from its schools. I fully realize the impact of cutting staff, which will result in increasing class size to 30 in some cases. I understand the devastation of closing elementary school libraries and eliminating the fourth grade instrumental music program. I feel it is deplorable that I will have to layoff the School Resource Officer when we only need to watch television and read the newspapers about horrible incidences which have occurred in places like Columbine and Paducah, Kentucky. I cringe at the thought of eliminating transportation for all school children in Grades 7 through 12, and moving even further, to two miles, the distance that elementary children will now have to walk or be transported to school. I also am devastated knowing that I cannot replace computers when they fail, or provide professional development opportunities for our teachers because I have no more money available in the budget. I am also deeply concerned that we will have to cut a custodian at our Middle/High School causing us to close the building on weekends, thus limiting community access to the building. None of this has been easy for our students, you, the parents, the School Committee, or the administrative team. These cuts tear at the very essence of what good schools and quality education are all about.

I have received numerous emails, phone calls and personal contacts from many of you asking what you can do to help. In the days and weeks ahead, I will do my very best to keep you informed as to the upcoming Board of Selectmen meetings and Finance Committee meetings where the issue of the Town and school budgets and a potential override will be discussed. I urge you to attend and voice your opinions. Most importantly, I urge you to attend Town Meeting on Tuesday, May 13, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the Middle/High School Performing Arts Center, where the meeting will decide on Town and school budgets, and on whether to allow the citizens to vote on the override. It is ultimately up to the citizens of this community as to what the future of our schools will look like. With your support, we will strive to provide the children of Ipswich with the educational experience that you have come to expect and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Korb", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard L. Korb  
Superintendent of Schools

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