



# Irvington Insight

The Official Newsletter for Irvington UFSD

[www.IrvingtonSchools.org](http://www.IrvingtonSchools.org)

## Capital Project Updates

The finishing touches are being made on the District's \$18.9 million capital project. After the holiday recess, the District was excited to open the redesigned High School entrance with new security vestibules. Here is a recap of the work by building:

### Dows Lane Elementary:

- New security vestibules
- New gym floor and air conditioning installed
- Replacement of boiler
- Replacement of the roof over the library
- Paving of the parking lot
- Makeover of the library to become an Innovation Suite
- Addition of an outdoor restroom facility for school and community use

### Main Street School:

- Conversion of an old science classroom to a STEM/PLTW space

- Computer lab remodeled to be the new Innovation Center
- Replacement of a waste line
- Upgrade of the electrical service
- Addition of air conditioning in the gymnasium (still in progress)
- Painting of the bell tower and repaving of the parking lot

### Middle/High School Campus:

- Secure enclosure of the campus walkways
- New security vestibules
- Science room, art room and music room renovations
- Regrading of the High School entrance for universal access
- Univent (air handlers) replaced in several classrooms and upgraded air handler controls
- Renovation of the Campus library and creation of new spaces to accommodate student collaborative learning
- Air conditioning installed in the Maher and Campus



Dows Lane Innovation Suite

- gymnasiums (still in progress)
- Repaving of the parking lot and installation of solar lighting
- Addition of the new Campus Learning Pavilion, including an outdoor classroom, restrooms, athletic trainer treatment clinic, concession stand and athletic storage space
- Addition of new bleachers and press box
- Replacement of carpet and installation of a new projector screen in the Campus Theater

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Dear Irvington School Community,

This school year began with positive energy as our students and staff members alike looked forward to resuming traditional school experiences, while putting most of the pandemic-related restrictions behind us. As the school year progressed, we were reminded of that which we missed so dearly during those difficult times.

Seeing one another's faces, unobstructed by a mask, and being in closer proximity to another to engage in conversation has been crucial. There is no question that this level of personal interaction is a key factor in developing relationships and fostering a strong sense of community within each school building. Each day, I am energized by the passion, creativity and determination that is present in every classroom. Our students and staff come to school with great spirit and enthusiasm for the teaching and learning experiences they will engage in during the course of the day. Much of this is due to the fact that we have learned many lessons in the past years, and among them is the value of the personal connections that we share and the benefits that come with being in a close-knit, supportive community. There is no question that the Irvington UFSD and our school community is second to none.

In addition, the imminent completion of the Capital Project has added additional layers of excitement and has complemented student learning experiences. Thanks to the support of the school community, our students have the ability to attend to their learning in modern, state-of-the-art learning facilities that are safe and comfortable.

This year, the faculty, staff and administration are continuing to focus on enhancing student learning experiences in a welcoming environment. In doing so, we are committed to continuous improvement through the utilization of data to inform instruction and update curricula to ensure that each student's needs are met through dynamic learning experiences. Through my daily observations, I continue to be encouraged by the examples of excellence that surround us; wherein, students are taking academic risks, acting as highly effective communicators, demonstrating resilience and self-reliance, and are consistently displaying their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

As the year progresses, we will continue to celebrate the accomplishments and growth of our students and the determined efforts of our faculty and staff, who make it all possible. Our success as a school community is the result of our shared commitment to each other's well-being and the notion that the very best school experiences will only come if we are willing to continue to have challenging conversations, acknowledge that we can always do better and remain open to new thinking. This is a commitment we have made together and one that will serve the children of the Irvington community well.

Every student, every day,  
Dr. Kristopher Harrison  
Superintendent of Schools



## A Message from your Superintendent of Schools

Kristopher Harrison, Ed.D.

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As we enter 2023 and look forward to the first days of spring, the District has embarked upon one of its most important initiatives: updating our strategic plan.

The strategic plan is the common thread running through all of the District's efforts. It provides a foundation for all of the District's work, identifies the District's mission, vision and core values, and articulates the District's goals in terms of the strengths and skills it seeks for Irvington's graduates. Thank you to all of the stakeholders who provided feedback through focus groups and the survey. The process will continue through the end of spring, with additional public meetings at which the Board, administrators and our professional partners will develop and finalize the updated strategic plan.

The outcome of a different long-term District initiative -- our Capital Project -- can be seen as you drive up to the Campus: specifically, the new traffic pattern and entrance to the High School that was recently completed as part of Phase Two of the Capital Project. As important, but not visible from the outside, Phase Two included renovations to the Campus and Dows Lane libraries and the installation of air conditioning in the Campus and Main Street School gyms (the Dows Lane gym was air conditioned during Phase One).

The Capital Project, an over five-year endeavor, has transformed the District's facilities and addressed some long-standing maintenance needs. The District's fiscal health allowed it to secure a favorable rate on the bond for the Capital Project such that the new debt service costs less than the prior debt service it replaced. The project is on budget and is debt neutral. Thank you to those community members who volunteered to help develop the project's scope. Also, thank you to all of the Trustees, current and former, as well as the administration and the District's professional partners for their work on the project.

And, for the second year in a row, one of the District's athletic teams has won a state championship. Congratulations to the girls soccer team on their outstanding season.

February brings the start of school budget season and a series of Board of Education meetings dedicated to the budget process. The BOE and the District administration, as always, will be guided by our strategic objectives and long-range plans to develop tax-cap compliant budgets that maintain fiscal responsibility while endeavoring to continuously improve the educational experience for students and teachers.

We encourage you to attend our meetings to learn more about the budget, our strategic planning process and the District's work and long-term goals. Also, you can always contact us at [board@irvingtonschools.org](mailto:board@irvingtonschools.org).

Best,  
Brian Friedman  
Board of Education President



## A Message from your Board of Education President

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Brian Friedman



# Capital Project Updates

## Districtwide

- Addition of solar/security window film in most first-floor classrooms/offices of all buildings
- Addition of the Facilities Storage Building located behind the High School (still in progress) for maintenance work and equipment storage
- All light fixtures retrofitted with LEDs
- Installation of card key access for enhanced security and more immediate door locking in an emergency (lock down)

While the installation of the air conditioning at the Campus and Main Street School gyms have been delayed, it is anticipated that these

improvements will be implemented as soon as supplies can be obtained. This capital project was debt neutral (replaced retiring debt) and thus resulted in no increase to the general fund budget. While the general fund does support annual facilities maintenance and small projects, larger projects must be funded through a capital project and community support. The Board of Education, District staff, the architectural firm of H2M and the professional construction team at Triton Construction have managed this large-scale and complicated project very successfully. The continued support and patience of the community has been greatly appreciated by all involved.

# Educators Engage in Restorative Practices

Twenty-five educators participated in the District's restorative practices professional learning during a two-day session. They engaged in deep conversations about ways to continue to foster positive relationships, resolve disagreements and build a school community that will optimize student learning and success.

During the sessions, staff members participated in a restorative circle and collaborated in small groups to learn how to use circles to build community in their classrooms.

"The biggest takeaway was truly building a community of learners with our students," first grade teacher Ann Marie Reardon said. "One way to build community is with the restorative circles. During that time, we connected with one another on a deeper level. Building these relationships with our students will not only be beneficial for the social-emotional growth but it will impact their learning, too."

Teachers said they felt comfortable leading, incorporating and engaging in circles with their classes following the training. They also expressed appreciation for the

District's support in systematically implementing proactive strategies to foster relationships and support students in feeling welcomed and heard – all essential ingredients for social-emotional well-being and academic success.

"These proactive circles will provide safe spaces to share, all students get to speak and participate in discussions, and students can take on leadership roles within the circle," K-5 school counselor Alissa Campbell said.

Fourth grade teacher Diane Watkinson said that what stood out to her from the training was the importance of building community and trust within the classroom. She and her fellow educators took away strategies to use circles and affirming statements to connect with students and develop their social-emotional learning. High school psychologist Noreen Sabia said the professional learning work she engaged in was a great way to help students establish a sense of community and belonging in a safe space.

"I love that each person has a voice in the circle and will be heard," Sabia said. "It is also a platform to tell stories, build relationships and make



connections."

Dr. Gail Duffy, the assistant superintendent for instruction and human resources said, "We are excited to learn how restorative practices can support our DEI work. By learning these new strategies, we are focusing on creating welcoming and affirming learning environments that are inclusive for all."

The staff members, who represented all schools during the training, will continue to engage in professional learning throughout the school year. The session on restorative practices was a recommendation that came from the District's root cause analysis work to provide staff with additional resources to support students where there is a conflict at school.

# Welcoming New Administrators

## **Jon Hirsch,** **Principal of Irvington High School**

Following an extremely comprehensive and highly competitive search process, the Board of Education appointed Jon Hirsch as principal of Irvington High School.



“Jon is an experienced principal with deep experience that has prepared him well to guide IHS to continued success while helping the school community and its students to achieve their fullest potential,” Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kristopher Harrison said.

As an administrator, instructional leader and innovator, Hirsch has a proven history of program development, community partnership and a commitment to empowering students and teachers to promote engagement and the development of 21st-century skills. His philosophy is that schools must focus on two primary areas: rigor and joy.

“With that in mind, Jon will seek to collaborate with the faculty to provide the very best learning experience to prepare students for college and life beyond IHS, while building school spirit and ensuring that their time in high school includes positive, enjoyable experiences,” Dr. Harrison said.

Hirsch most recently served as principal of Valhalla High School, where he led a high-performing and diverse high school. During his tenure, he expanded programs to support students’ social-emotional needs, increase engagement, ensure access and opportunity for all students and created a leadership structure for teachers.

“I am tremendously excited to join the Irvington school

community,” Hirsch said. “It is not often that you get the opportunity to be part of a community that values its schools as much as Irvington does. I am committed to ensuring that IHS remains a place of high standards and academic rigor, while at the same time making sure that every student is cared for and that the high school years are joyous ones. Having worked with the faculty and students at Irvington High School and getting to know the leadership team, I understand how special the school is. I look forward to getting to know all members of the Irvington High School community even better.”

## **Sara Rust,** **Irvington High School** **Interim Assistant Principal**

On Sept. 6, the Board of Education appointed Sara Rust to serve as interim assistant principal at Irvington High School for the 2022-2023 school year.



Rust joined the District in September 2015 as the secondary instructional coach. In this capacity, she has worked closely with middle and high school faculty and administrators to support growth in instructional practices and to strengthen and expand curriculum. Additionally, she has been a leader in the District’s diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, serving as a facilitator of culturally responsive-sustaining education lead learner training.

“Ms. Rust’s deep instructional and curricular expertise, coupled with her well-established relationships within the school community, will quickly prove

to be an asset in her new role as the interim assistant principal,” Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kristopher Harrison said. “Working in partnership with Principal Hirsch and the IHS faculty and staff, Ms. Rust is eager to engage with our students and their families to create a memorable school year filled with impressive student growth and achievement, as well as joyful school experiences.”

Prior to joining the Irvington UFSD faculty, Rust worked in New York City as an English as a new language teacher, science teacher and a curriculum developer. Her professional writing has been published in multiple media outlets, including The New York Times.

## **Thomas Chickery,** **Dows Lane Elementary School** **Assistant Principal**

On Aug. 15, the Board of Education appointed Thomas Chickery as Dows Lane Elementary School assistant principal.



“I am confident he will serve the school community well by continuing to advance District priorities and supporting our students’ growth and development,” Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kristopher Harrison said.

Chickery is a compassionate and enthusiastic educational leader who has served as an assistant principal in the region for three years. Prior to becoming a school-level administrator, he was a teacher and instructional leader for 10 years in New York City.

# A Written Approach at Dows Lane

Teachers and related service providers at Dows Lane have been working closely with Nancy Beck-Deakin, K-5 instructional literacy coach, to hone their instructional skills related to writing. This year, Beck-Deakin introduced tiny notebooks to all teachers to help students capture small moments in their writing throughout the year.

The students at Dows Lane have been applying their writing skills to reading, math word problems, science and social studies. Most recently, classes have been focused on narrative stories and informational writing in the respective Unit Planners. These are done in a differentiated manner at each grade level, with some students using Chromebooks or

Post-it Notes. Other classes may write on large chart paper on the walls in a chalk-talk, which is where students share ideas across the classroom.

Dows Lane related service providers and specials teachers are also working with students to express their thinking in writing, and their efforts are making a difference!

In addition to Unit Planners, the Heggerty system for phonological awareness has been introduced in kindergarten and first grade classes. Using letter names and sound, students build phonemic awareness and bridge the phoneme-grapheme connection to support writing. Patterns of Power, a grammar program, has also been introduced



to students in grades 1-3. Students study model sentences in Patterns of Power to note the ways authors use grammar to convey meaning in writing.

Dows Lane looks forward to expanding upon these initiatives to further enhance students' skills each year.

## Main Street Makers of Change

Main Street School is a kind, respectful and inclusive community where students are introduced to the ideas of being global citizens and Makers of Change. Global citizens are individuals who are aware of and understand the wider world – and their place in it. Makers of Change are individuals who demonstrate empathy and acceptance through intrinsic actions that celebrate the diversity of humanity.

Character-building lessons are formally taught and embedded throughout the school day and special schoolwide events related to character building foster a positive environment in which children can learn.

To provide real-world connections for the students' learning and ways in which they can transfer learning, the school participates in local and global projects. Examples of these include an extensive recycling program in which students and staff sort their trash on a daily basis, PACER's Unity Day to raise awareness about the prevention

of bullying, and participation and fundraising for the Be a Friend Project which supports individuals who have been bullied. To really bring home the concept of global citizenship and Makers of Change, the school community raised money for the India Water Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing reliable clean water for villages in rural India who lack access. This was inspired by the entire school's participation in the Global Read Aloud of "Thirst," by Varsha Bajaj.

The schoolwide projects are led by a group of interested students who make up student leadership teams. Students on the leadership teams make posters, organize and facilitate the associated fundraiser, make schoolwide announcements and so much more.

Additionally, individual students will present unique ideas of ways in which the school community can be Makers of Change. This year, a fifth grader presented the idea of organizing a drive for



a local shelter that was in need of necessity items. Everyone was encouraged to bring one item from a specific list that was provided by the shelter, so that 311 items would be donated. The school community was so generous that more than twice the number of items were donated.

The MSS school community hopes to inspire all to be global citizens and Makers of Change!



# Awards and Honors at IHS

Four Irvington High School students won regional Scholastic Writing Awards in the 2023 Hudson-to-Housatonic Writing Region. A panel of professional novelists, editors, teachers, poets, librarians, journalists and other literary professionals selected these works from 2,247 works submitted this year. The 148 most accomplished works were awarded Gold Keys, 234 Silver Keys were awarded to distinguished works and 290 honorable mentions were awarded to promising works.

Two of our talented writers at Irvington High School received Gold Keys for their entries. Junior Shiyun Chen won two awards, including a Gold Key in the Flash

Fiction category. Sophomore Tane Kim won an incredible eight awards in the Poetry category, one Gold Key, three Silver Keys and four honorable mentions. Hanna Reich, junior, won a Silver Key in the Personal Essay and Memoir category and an honorable mention for her Short Story entry. Finally, sophomore Scarlett Zumbro won three awards in the Critical Essay category, including a Silver Key. Congratulations to all the students on their outstanding work as well as to their proud teachers, Melisa Gacevic, Julie Ippolito and Jennifer Lentini.

This year's Gold Key, Silver Key and honorable mention recipients are invited, along with their



guests and teachers, to the 2023 Awards Ceremony for the Hudson-to-Housatonic Writing Region of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards held on Sunday, March 5. Additionally, Gold Key winners are automatically forwarded for consideration at the national level of the Scholastic Writing Awards.

# Authentically Engaging Students at IMS



Irvington Middle School emphasizes authentic, real-world learning experiences throughout the school year to reinforce the curriculum and to foster critical thinking and creativity. Assistant Principal Allyson Daley likes to call it “Hands on, Minds on” learning.

Principal David Sottile adds, “The objective of engaging students in real-world learning experiences is to develop their understanding of the relevance of course content and, even more importantly, to build habits of critical thought that are necessary to synthesize new learning with existing knowledge and apply their knowledge and skill in authentic situations. The amazing staff at IMS has been working on many projects with our students that utilize this approach.”

Some representative recent projects include:

- Eighth graders in Jon Mancini’s Home and Careers classes sewed stuffed felt monsters from the designs of first grade students from PS 59 in the Bronx.

- Students in Tara Chillemi and Olivia Evanko’s eighth grade ELA class created informational podcasts and were encouraged to submit them to NPR’s podcast challenge.
- Science teacher Tina Buzzetto has been working with students in seventh and eighth grades on “How do living things heal?” and “How can a sound make something move?” They listen, analyze, investigate and apply what they learn to explain their findings.
- Finally, students in Christina Mitchell’s, Alicia Rios’ and Eve Zeese’s seventh grade social studies classes participated in a Living History Program. They learned about the experiences of American soldiers during the American Revolution and life in 18th-century America.

Students enjoy these projects tremendously, as they reinforce collaborative learning and allow for the students to provide, as well as to receive, feedback from both teachers and peers during each step of their respective assignments.





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## Athletic Accomplishments

### 2021-22 School of Excellence Award

Irvington High School has been named a New York State Public High School Athletic Association 2021-22 Scholar-Athlete School of Excellence. This is the second consecutive year it has earned a School of Excellence distinction, recognizing its students' athletic and academic accomplishments.

To earn the distinction, 75% of the school's varsity teams must qualify and be recognized as Scholar-Athlete teams. During the 2021-22 school year, 24 out of Irvington's 26 varsity programs qualified as Scholar-Athlete teams.

According to NYSPHSAA, the program recognizes schools that value the importance of academics and athletics, and its purpose is to unite varsity coaches in challenging their teams to achieve a statewide academic honor. This year, 86 schools statewide earned School of

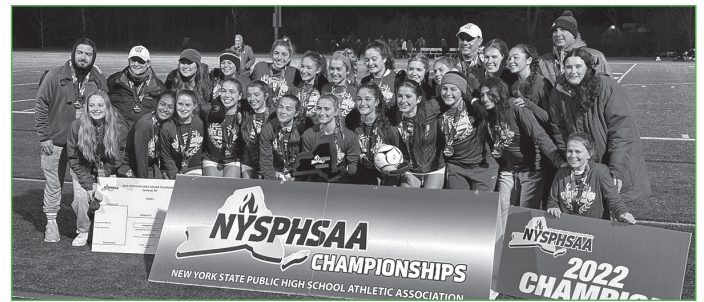
Distinction status, and 148 schools earned the School of Excellence award.

School of Excellence award winners will be presented with a plaque at their local athletic director workshop in the fall.

Joined by administrators, coaches, parents and teammates, the students were recognized at ceremonial letter of intent signings for their outstanding contributions to the school community.

### Girls Soccer Team Earns State Championship Title

The girls soccer team captured the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Class B state championship title on Nov. 13. They defeated Haverling High School in a 2-1 overtime game, held



at Cortland High School.

Under the leadership of coach Patrick DiBenedetto, the Bulldogs won their first state championship in program history.

"Their talents go well beyond the technical and tactical elements of the game," Athletic Director John Buonamano said. "Their ability to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity and sharing their love for their sport and one another, coupled with the incredible individual and team leadership, stems from the top."

## Flourishing Arts Programs Continue to Impress

The District's amazing music and art programs continue to thrive this school year. Our incredible students have performed in large-scale, interactive productions like this fall's play, "The Plot, Like Gravy, Thickers"; have been chosen based on New York State School Music Association Solo scores to participate in All-State Music ensembles; wowed audiences during their annual winter concert series and even curated an art exhibit which hung in the Irvington Public Library throughout February. These dedicated students are not only talented, but they are also extremely supportive of one another and have developed relationships that will last well beyond their high school years.

"As a department, we are so unbelievably proud of all of our students and their incredible accomplishments," Debra McCumber, music department chairperson said. "Our students work extremely hard and their talents, musicianship and passion for the arts shine through whenever they perform."



High School students presented the fall play, "The Plot, Like Gravy, Thickers" on Nov. 4-5.