

IPEI takes funding efforts to next level with \$600,000 capital campaign

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In a time when public schools have fewer and fewer financial resources to provide extra opportunities for students, finding ways to give kids a chance to get hands-on, enriching experiences is a challenge.

For Ithaca's public schools, however, the Ithaca Public Education Initiative has been helping fill the gaps in funding. Now, the non-profit organization has launched its biggest initiative yet — a \$600,000 capital campaign.

The campaign, according to IPEI, is aimed at helping keep up with the demand for which its grants and programs are currently seeing from local educators.

“This campaign is an opportunity for all of us to help make Ithaca's schools the very best,” said IPEI President Terry Byrnes in a prepared statement. “We are doing this for our kids, our schools, our community and our future.”

The “Our Children, Our Schools, Our Future” campaign addresses three priority areas — increasing the number and size of grants IPEI is able to award, shifting from being strictly an all-volunteer group and building an endowment that will allow the organization to continue its support for ICSD's schools.

That requests for funding will continue to increase is not in question. To meet those growing number of requests, the Ithaca Public Education Initiative is looking to the Ithaca community.

“IPEI is receiving more and more requests for support — we want to be able to say ‘Yes’ to the project proposals that can make a positive difference for our kids' educational experiences,” said IPEI Vice President Jennifer Engel in a prepared statement. “This campaign will allow IPEI to make an even greater difference in our schools, but we cannot do it without support from the community.”

Since the organization was founded in 1996, IPEI has awarded more than 1,100 grants totaling more than \$1.3 million. This school year alone, more than \$300,000 in grants have been awarded.

“IPEI has grown in importance to teachers and students every year,” said Mary Grainger, who along with Byrnes and Engel is a tri-chair of the Campaign, in a prepared statement. “The teachers and students need us and we need your help. IPEI is the vehicle through which you can show your support for excellence in our classrooms.”

IPEI has broken down what it would do with the funds. Half of the goal — \$300,000 — is planned to expand current programs and grants, including its Teacher, Red & Gold and Community Collaboration grants, funding for Kids Discover the Trail! (which has allowed 15,000 children to all

eight Discovery Trail sites in the last eight years), affiliations with and support for Code Red Robotics and the Fine Arts Booster Group, special fund and awards.

It has earmarked \$180,000 of the goal to aid in IPEI's planned transition from a volunteer-run organization to one with paid staff that will offer a sustainable structure to handle the rapid growth of the non-profit. Finally, \$120,000 of the campaign goal will establish an unrestricted endowment fund.

According to IPEI, it receives more than 150 requests for funding annually. The organization is hopeful that the campaign will allow it to increase not only the number of requests being approved each year as well as the amounts of money being handed out.

A recent opportunity for South Hill Elementary School students is one example of what IPEI's funding programs can mean.

In mid-May, South Hill hosted a Latin American Fiesta, capping off the end of three-week artist residency by Jose Cuevas, funding through an IPEI Community Collaboration grant, a Fine Arts Booster Group mini grant and an Ithaca College Partnership in Teaching Grant. Dance, music, visual arts, storytelling, history, geography, culture and food preparation were among the activities, tied to Latin American culture, that students took part in as part of the residency.

"While our educational goal was to have students explore Latin American cultures through the arts, we also learned about ourselves," said South Hill Principal Colleen Ledley at the fiesta event. "Many of our South Hill families and staff have cultural connections to Latin American countries including Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia."

"Our fiesta provided a wonderful tie-in to 5th grade academics because we study Latin America including pre-Columbian cultures of the Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas, and we spend time learning about current Latin America," said South Hill fifth grade teacher Jane Koestler. "I think the integration of the arts brings an additional level of meaning to the curriculum and definitely leaves students with vivid memories tied to their learning."

Parent Marisa LaFalce appreciated that the school hosted the family event so "we could see what the children had been doing and talking about."

"For the last three weeks, my son has talked non-stop about Jorge," she added. "I think the school-wide enrichment was very positive, and it was inclusive of everyone."

Cuevas had presented in schools in the past, but only for assemblies — nothing like his residency.

"I then put together programs with the help of other local artists, and from that moment on I found the most rewarding work of my life," he said in a prepared statement. "There is nothing more fulfilling for me. I believe that making a difference in students' lives is a gift that I cherish and

value.

“I love it when parents tell me that their children are teaching them the dance at home and that their children seem more excited about going to school,” he added. “It’s also great to hear from teachers that they appreciate how I reinforce their curriculum with my stories, and their students seem more engaged and excited to participate in class.”

And it’s not just teacher grants being awarded or field trips being funded — the district has been the recipient of funding assistance itself.

Last month, it was announced that IPEI was contributing \$89,850 for the Ithaca City School District’s “Teaching and Learning with Technology 1:1 Initiative.”

The initiative, part of the philosophy brought to the district by Superintendent Luvelle Brown, is a pilot program featuring a mobile device for each teacher and student in 10 classrooms in ICSD’s elementary and secondary schools. To help fund the program, IPEI worked with many individual and business partners to raise the money.

At the meeting announcing the funding, Brown explained that purchasing electronic devices and other classroom equipment is secondary to professional development and pedagogical considerations.

“There is an evolving role for teachers as instructional designers and some of the innovations are related to improvements to assessment and differentiated and individualized instruction,” he said in a prepared statement.

Throughout the ICSD school year, teachers in the “1:1 Initiative” began using the devices as classroom sets (not going home with students), although some have since assigned them to individual students (a fifth grade class at Cayuga Heights Elementary School, a social studies class at Ithaca High School and IHS’s AVID students) to allow them to bring the devices home with them. Other classes that are part of the pilot include a third grade class at South Hill Elementary, English classes at LACS and DeWitt Middle School, math classes at Boynton Middle School, and an algebra and three English classes at Ithaca High School.

Teachers involved with the pilot program have established a Professional Learning Community group, said Brown.

“Their face-to-face and virtual meetings allow them to share best practices and lessons learned. Teachers have already reported increased student engagement,” he said in a prepared statement.

“The increased student engagement is in large part due to the reported shifts in instructional practices that are creative and innovative.”

“Another positive consequence of the initial implementation has been evidence of closing the digital

divide that previously existed between students with technology tools at home and those without,” added Byrnes in a prepared statement.

The organization also recently announced its end of the year awards, totaling \$5,900, from its Special Funds, which allow donors to honor individuals or groups and are distributed annually based on the criteria for each one.

The awards include:

- The Noreen Moore Memorial Award was awarded at the Ithaca High School Senior Awards Convocation to Carolyn Marie Eggleston. The scholarship is presented annually to an Ithaca High School senior planning to study social work and/or early childhood education. Yvonne Everhart, the daughter of Noreen Moore, made the presentation in memory of her mother, who was an active member of the school district staff and community.
- The recipient of the Carol Jean Buckley Scholarship for Students in the Arts is Ananda Brutvan, a senior at the Lehman Alternative Community School. Principal Joe Greenberg presented the award at Ananda’s Senior Meeting. Joining her family at the presentation was LACS teacher Jon Raimon, formerly a high school classmate of Buckley’s. Established by her family and friends, the scholarship provides assistance for talented students pursuing advanced study in the arts.
- Each year, IPEI’s Ithaca High School Senior Class Fund provides the senior class an opportunity to recognize both a new teacher who exemplifies enthusiasm and creativity and a school club that makes a positive impact on student life. This year’s New Teacher Award went to Leann Donnelly, a school counselor. The Student Organization Award went to the Red Cross Club.
- Natalia McClellan, a junior, received the Raymond C. Loehr Environmental Science Scholarship Award at the Awards Ceremony for Underclassmen. Presented by Leann Donnelly, the award recognizes an underclassman who shows promise in environmental science. The Raymond C. Loehr Innovative Science Teaching Award, which recognizes innovative science teaching, will be announced in the fall.
- The Phyllis B. Brodhead Library Media Technology Fund grants funds to help school district library media centers keep current with technological advances. This year the award will be used to purchase Playaways, digital audio books that allow challenged readers to listen to a book professionally read aloud while following the text. Technically known as “shared reading,” this learning mode can develop reading fluency, vocabulary, story sense, and comprehension. The Playaways will be housed at the Boynton Middle School library, where Phyllis was a dedicated teacher and librarian for 33 years, and will be available for loan to other district libraries.
- Fifth grade students throughout the school district are the beneficiaries each year of the Ian

Alberta Fund. Established to support Kids Discover the Trail! activities at the Cayuga Nature Center, the fund provides students with books that complement the program.

The capital campaign has already raised more than \$500,000 in early and lead gifts from 75 donors, and IPEI hopes to conclude the effort by early fall. But, there is always room for more — especially donations.

IPEI is a community-based, tax-exempt not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and it invites contributions and pledges, in the form of cash, credit cards, and securities, over a one- to three-year period. The IPEI campaign also welcomes participation through bequests or other planned gifts. For more information, visit the Ithaca Public Education Initiative website at www.ipei.org, call (607) 256- 4734 or e-mail ipei@ipei.org.