ISSAQAH SCHOOLS FOUNDATION — ALL IN FOR KIDS

“Honestly, it’s completely given me a purpose to get up in the morning.” — Robotics Club Member

Funding for public education is a national issue. In Washington State, we are living in a time of uncertainty, as well as differing opinions, about the new state funding model for education and the impact it has had on local contract negotiations across the state. What we do know for certain is that the demands and expectations of our teachers are greater than ever. Our role in preparing students to accept the academic, occupational, personal, and practical challenges of life in a dynamic global environment—the very mission of our District—cannot be understated.

The Issaquah School District benefited from the new state education funding model, for which we thank the Washington State Senators. On August 22, 2018, our Board of Directors ratified a new four year contract with the Issaquah Educators Association (IEA), providing an average 15.5% salary increase to our certificated staff. This salary increase allows the Issaquah School District to remain competitive with the salaries of neighboring districts and offers our teaching professionals some relief from the pressures of the high cost of living in our region.

While the District views this as a historic moment, who better to describe the impact of the new contract than a teacher? FOCUS sat down with Gary Arthur, a 25 year teaching veteran who is also the current Issaquah Education Association President, to learn his perspective on how this agreement impacts our learning community.

Gary notes that one of the ways that society shows honor and respect is through contracts. Teachers have often experienced a disparity as they watch friends they went to college with surpassing them in terms of things like buying nice houses, sending their kids to college, and being able to travel on vacations. “Those of us who chose teaching didn’t have that, but we did plan to be middle class,” explains Gary. Throughout the bargaining process, Gary states, that it was appreciated that the District trusted numbers and understood the membership’s concerns. “They met with us and that place of mutual respect throughout the bargaining process and as a result, I thought I was respected, I don’t feel underpaid.”

However, Gary cautions, a young teacher coming into the ISD today with a Bachelor’s Degree and one or two years of experience is still going to have difficulty finding affordable housing near their place of work and will likely face a long commute. That said, “There’s enough income to give teachers hope. As opposed to having to put off important things such as buying a house or starting a family indefinitely, those on the lower end of the salary schedule have some hope. For those of us who have more experience, it gives one a sense that there is still room to grow, that my income will still go up and that’s a good feeling! Experienced teachers may now be in a position to save for retirement or pay down debt, which they were not before.”

Salary compensation is only one element in the contract agreement that benefits teachers and students. According to Gary, other big highlights of the contract center around increased English Language Learning (ELL) teacher support and the implementation of full time Positive Behavior and Social Emotional Support (PBSEs) coaches. “ELL teachers are amazing specialists,” Gary explains. “They are a vital resource to teachers who have English Language Learning students in their classrooms.”

Gary also says that PBSEs coaches being boosted to full time from half time will be a tremendous lift to all teachers as they assist in creating systems that promote a positive environment in their classroom and throughout the school.

Another vital component of the agreement involves professional development. “Having professional learning coaches is a game changer,” says Gary. “The Issaquah School District is a high performer and very competitive district. When you come to teach here, you’re going to learn at least 50 acronyms and three sophisticated computer systems, not to mention adapting to the culture in your building.” The District is providing top notch teachers ready to take on the challenge of getting new staff up to speed and experienced continually growing to new heights. The District also agreed to increasing counselor time in secondary schools and the first time in the history of the District, all elementary schools now have full time counselors.

Gary says that these counselors help bridge the gaps everyone in the system. “When we have a student presenting with anxiety or depression, it affects everyone because every classroom is like a little community. We need someone available who is trained to support students with mental health issues, so it is an enormous gain for us.”

Gary also mentioned that he is pleased that the District was open to creating opportunities to work on issues with regard to Echo Glen, the State Juvenile Rehabilitation Center run by the ISD. Gary explains that the District cannot enrich the program up at Echo Glen using Local Levy dollars, which is frustrating because the population is made up of a very vulnerable set of kids and the staff there has an enormous task. “Just knowing that we can initiate conversations with the District about the complicated, scary jobs that Echo Glen teachers have, has a big impact on us. We know we are putting kids there at first, and, to the extent that we can, improve and change there.”

Finally, the new contract, being a four year deal, provides for stability and security, which benefits both the District and the community as a whole. Gary reminds us, “Children in school today may well be one day the leaders of our community. They are born here and they have a right to education and learn about and understand the nuances of our society. To learn how to heal sick people, how to build things, and how to create.”

Truly, we all benefit from a student population that is engaged and giving back to the community. As the many teachers that supported me, who encouraged me to be in the school band, take up sports, and participate in the student affairs. And the Issaquah School Board of Directors cutting the ribbon on the stage. After the event, attendees enjoyed dessert treats and toured the new building.

PINE LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL CELEBRATES NEW BUILDING WITH RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY

What truly makes a school special? At Pine Lake Middle School, it is the people and traditions that create a special sense of place and belonging. So it is no surprise that the Pine Lake Wolves’ ribbon cutting ceremony honored tradition while celebrating the new. Principal Michelle Caporongo expressed her thanks to the many people involved from the contractors and architects, the ISD New Construction Team to staff members and the families and community members who made the rebuild possible by approving the 2016 school bond. PIMS Wood Shop Teacher, Roy Cress, gave a heartfelt speech and explained that, “Pine Lake has a get together it is traditional to sing a song. He grabbed his guitar and got the whole crowd singing a rendition of This Land is Your Land. Maia Knox from the City of Sammamish was also at the event and expressed the importance of schools and great learning environments within the greater community. Superintendent Ron Thiele took a few moments to express his thanks to voters for supporting the District’s bonds and levies as well as the hard work of those involved in the project. The School Board of Directors along with the Issaquah School Board of Directors cutting the ribbon on the stage. After the event, attendees enjoyed dessert treats and toured the new building.
**ISSAQUAH SCHOOL DISTRICT WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR OF SAFETY, DAVE MONTALVO!**

School Safety is a top concern for the Issaquah School District as well as our families. While statistics are very clear that schools are among the safest places for a child to be, when the news brings us stories of tragedies happening in schools around the nation, it makes sense that people are concerned. Thanks to the support of local voters who passed the District’s Programs and Operations Levies, the Issaquah School District has invested in renovating buildings and expanding capacity as well as providing more resources to our schools.

Dave Montalvo, Issaquah School District’s new Director of Safety and Security, has more than 30 years of experience with the King County Sheriff’s Office. For our families who live in the Liberty High School area, Dave is familiar face having spent the past the 13 years as an SRO for our south end schools as well as those in unincorporated King County where he has been an SRO for the Issaquah School District.

“It’s amazing,” says Dave. “When I became the SRO at Liberty High School, it was to be only a two-year commitment. I had no idea I would be there for another 11 years, but I have developed such a deep appreciation for the kids. It’s been the experience of my life!”

Dave’s experience wasn’t his first in school, Dave was one of the original DARE instructors in our region. DARE is a program developed to educate our young people about the importance of avoiding drugs and other illegal behaviors. Dave now works with many of those children in our schools.

“None of us who work in education has a population of kids that we work with that are as innovative as our students are. We’re constantly impressed with the amount of time and resources the students put into their work every day. They’re working on projects that are going to change the world. The kids are teaching us how to do our jobs.”

Dave has worked with school supplies, scholarships, and offering opportunities to kids. When I come across a student with a need for something, it’s an honor to be able to help them. When I come across a student who needs help but is far from a school, it’s an honor to be able to help them there as well.

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**COUGAR RIDGE ELEMENTARY COMPLETES 2016 BOND EXPANSION PROJECT**

Cougars have an eye on the future and that includes the expansion project at Cougar Ridge. The Cougar Ridge Elementary Principal’s vision was to create a space that provided an environment for students to focus on learning and growing. The Additional classroom space created through the expansion allows students to have a larger collaborative space to make learning fun.

The expansion project included the construction of two new classrooms, enlargement of the cafeteria, and the renovation of the gym, classroom, and dining area. The new classrooms and the renovation of the area allowed the school to continue to meet the needs of our students.

The project was completed in 2016 and the school is now ready for the next academic year. The expansion included an additional six classrooms to accommodate all students. The new classrooms are designed to provide an environment that is conducive to learning and growth.

The design of the classrooms incorporates natural light, a variety of seating options, and access to technology. The classrooms are equipped with mobile furniture to facilitate flexible learning arrangements. The new classrooms also provide additional storage space for materials and supplies.

The new classrooms have been designed to meet the needs of all students. The classrooms are equipped with moveable walls to create flexible learning spaces. The rooms are also equipped with technology to support a range of instructional approaches.

The Cougar Ridge Elementary School District wanted to provide a learning environment that would support the growth and development of all students. The expansion project was completed in 2016 and the school is now ready for the next academic year.