

IPEI Celebrates 15 Years: By the Numbers

1 IPEI Roundtable
2 Affiliates
3 Grant Programs
7 Special Funds
8 *Kids Discover the Trail!* Sites
10 Years with the affiliate Fine Arts Booster Group!
13 Annual Adult Spelling Bees
1,000+ Grants Awarded
\$1,000,000+ Funds Granted

IPEI: Fifteen & Forward

In 1995, a task force of community members committed to maintaining the excellence of Ithaca's schools began meeting in response to a challenge set forth in the ICSD Strategic Plan of 1994. It called for a vehicle that could facilitate access to the community resources needed to ensure the success of all students in the district, and resulted in the birth of the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI). IPEI was incorporated as a non-profit entity with 501(c)(3) status, and its all-volunteer board of directors met for the first time in 1996.

From the beginning, IPEI was and remains dedicated to creating avenues for community involvement in public education, enabling and rewarding excellence in teaching, and helping to develop exciting educational projects that cannot be funded through tax dollars alone. This was manifested first and foremost in IPEI's Teacher Grants: a program that awards grants (now in amounts up to \$1,500) to individual teachers to fund innovative projects that must include the involvement of a community partner. Over the years, IPEI added a number of other grant programs including Red & Gold Grants, which provide up to \$500 to support projects developed by teachers, staff members, students, families, or community members; and Community Collaboration Grants awarded to non-profit community organizations wishing to initiate curricular-enhancing programs with the ICSD.

To date, IPEI has awarded more than 1,000 grants totaling over \$1,000,000—an astonishing record of success and a testament not just to the dedication and commitment of the many volunteers who serve on its board, serve on its various committees, help to organize its annual Adult Spelling Bee fundraising event, and contribute in many ways both tangible and intangible. It is also a testament to the commitment of the entire Ithaca community to educational excellence, because every penny of the \$1,000,000 came from the community. IPEI's accomplishments are something in which all of us can take pride.

IPEI's commitment to education has extended to fostering affiliates, such as with the Fine Arts Booster Group and Code Red Robotics.

Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG) Affiliates with IPEI

In 2000 Michael Allen, who was then Cayuga Heights Elementary Band teacher and is now middle school band teacher, noted a need for a music booster group due to the terrible state of the instrument inventory. ICSD Superintendent Dr. Judith Pastel supported the formation of a booster group including all the arts. Aided by Randy Ehrenberg, Assistant Superintendent; Holly Kazarinoff, TST BOCES Enrichment Coordinator; and volunteer facilitator Elayne Nicholas; an ad hoc group of parents, teachers and community members met to determine a group structure, draw up bylaws and form a first board. After a six-month discussion, the inaugural board led by first president Patti Nozell was anxious to begin organizing support for the arts. IPEI agreed to act as the non-profit umbrella for this new group, and work together in an affiliate relationship. The school year 2001-2002 marked the first year of operation for the Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG) and culminated in a fundraiser called Festival of Talents, a student, teacher and community member variety show at the State Theater and an art exhibit at Autumn Leaves Bookstore, featuring teachers' art work.

"We are all better together." states past booster president Martha Frommelt. "Working with IPEI's board and learning from their experiences has made the booster group stronger. In turn, the boosters have been able to bring focused community connection to the arts."

Now approaching year ten, the Fine Arts Booster Group celebrates its affiliate relationship with IPEI, as well as specific support for the arts. Tina Mollenkamp, current booster president, says, "I am inspired by the work IPEI is doing for the community as well as their continuous work to improve our organization. I know this partnership will maintain IPEI and FABG as strong supporters of ICSD as we go forward."