

IRSD Referendum Scheduled for June 5

The Indian River School District will host a current expense referendum on **Thursday, June 5, 2025**. The referendum will seek funding in the amount of \$22.5 million for increased operating costs and to maintain a competitive salary package.

Voting on June 5 is from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. at any of the following local polling places: East Millsboro Elementary School, Georgetown Elementary School, Indian River High School, Long Neck Methodist Church (new polling place), Lord Baltimore Elementary School, Millville Community Center, Selbyville Fire Hall (new polling place) and Sussex Central High School. To vote in the referendum, a person must be a citizen of the United States and the State of Delaware, must be domiciled within the Indian River School District, and must be at least 18 years of age.

"This is an extremely important referendum for the future of the Indian

River School District," IRSD Superintendent Dr. Jay Owens said. "Without additional local revenue, we will face difficult staffing decisions and potential impacts to our academic, athletic and extra-curricular programs. Our operating expenses are increasing at a rate that is simply not sustainable if we are to continue to provide quality educational services to our students.

"Since our last successful current expense referendum eight years ago, we have followed the standard cycle of building up, and then subsequently spending down, the district's reserve balances. That cycle, coupled with significant increases in operating expenses in recent years, has led the district to operate in a budget deficit since Fiscal Year 2023. We are now at a point where we need the public's assistance to sustain the high level of

services our students deserve."

Since the 2017 referendum, the largest escalations in operating expenses have occurred in utility costs, student transportation, substitute costs, mental health service units and required charter and choice school payments. The district's annual budget deficits since Fiscal Year 2023 have ranged from \$4.2 million to \$7.3 million. Without the passage of the referendum, further shortfalls are projected in FY26 and beyond.

The district must also offer a competitive salary package that will continue to attract talented educational professionals and maintain the quality programs and services being offered to students. The district has already reduced educational services, which

Continued on Page 3



Amanda Howard Named Teacher of the Year

Amanda Howard, a kindergarten teacher at Long Neck Elementary School, has been named the Indian River School District's Teacher of the Year for 2025-2026.

The announcement was made at the district's annual Teacher of the Year ceremony on May 8 at the Seed and Sapling events venue in Frankford. Amanda was chosen as the district's overall winner from a pool of 15 candidates, one from each school.

Mrs. Howard has been a kindergarten teacher at Long Neck Elementary School since 2014. Prior to joining the Long Neck staff, she spent a year as a fourth-grade teacher at Shortlidge Academy in the Red Clay Consolidated School District.

Mrs. Howard holds bachelor's of science degree in early childhood education from the University of Delaware and a master's of education degree from Wilmington University.



From left: State Rep. Ron Gray, IRSD Superintendent Dr. Jay Owens, 2025-2026 IRSD Teacher of the Year Amanda Howard and Board of Education President Leolga Wright at the ceremony on May 8.

Continued on Page 4

Indian River School District

"A Model of Excellence"

31 Hosier St.
Selbyville, DE 19975
(302) 436-1000
irsd.net

Board of Education

Leolga T. Wright
President

Gerald T. Peden
Vice President

Lisa Hudson Briggs

Derek E. Cathell

Kelly E. Kline

Ivan D. Neal

Constance T. Pryor

Mark L. Steele

Kimberly L. Taylor

Anita West-Werner

Dr. Jay F. Owens

*Board Secretary and
District Superintendent*

The Indian River School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate or deny services on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender, creed, religion, veteran status, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship status, pregnancy, age, ancestry, disability, gender identity, genetic information, military status or any other characteristic protected by law.

Follow us on:



irsd.net

From the Superintendent



Dear Parents,

As I reflect on all that our schools have accomplished this year, I am inspired by the amazing students and educators who work tirelessly to get the most out of their educational experience. You will find evidence of this commitment in many items highlighted in this newsletter.

Please note that **Thursday, June 5** will be an extremely important day in the Indian River School District. On that date, we will host a current expense referendum to raise additional local funding for increased operating costs and to maintain a competitive salary package for staff.

In recent years, we have seen our operating costs increase by approximately 7.4 percent annually and our revenue streams have simply not been able to keep pace. IRSD has been operating at a budget deficit since FY23, with these deficits ranging from \$4.2 million to \$7.3 million. Our operating expenses are increasing at a rate that is not sustainable if we are to continue to provide quality educational services to our students. Without additional local revenue, we will face difficult staffing decisions and potential impacts to our academic, athletic and extra-curricular programs.

IRSD is committed to providing premier educational programs to our students. Please remember that today's students are tomorrow's health care workers, business owners, first responders, service workers and civic leaders. We believe that successful schools and gifted educators help create vibrant communities and that passage of the referendum will benefit all residents of the Indian River School District.

On a separate note, I recently had the pleasure of attending an event that some have jokingly called "The Oscars of the Indian River School District." I'm speaking of the district's annual Teacher of the Year ceremony, which was held at the Seed and Sapling events venue on May 8. It was wonderful to see so many talented teachers honored that evening for their tireless commitment and dedication to our students. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to all of the school winners and, of course, to our overall district winner, Amanda Howard of Long Neck Elementary School. You make our district proud every day!

This is an exciting time of year when we honor our students through various end-of-year celebrations and awards ceremonies. I would like to congratulate all of our students on everything they've accomplished this year. Have a safe and relaxing summer and we'll see you in September!

Sincerely,

Dr. Jay F. Owens
Superintendent

District to Host Current Expense Referendum

From Page 1

resulted in decreased staffing districtwide. The district has further initiated cost-savings measures in the form of discretionary budget reductions.

With voter approval, the referendum will result in a tax increase of \$0.0559 per \$100 of assessed property value, which correlates to an increase of \$22.40 per month or \$268.88 per year for the average district taxpayer.

For more information about the referendum, visit the district's special referendum website at irsd.net/referendum. Residents can also contact Indian River's Referendum Hotline at (302) 436-1079 or submit questions via e-mail to referendum@irsd.k12.de.us.

Board Approves Series of Changes to '24-25 Calendar

The Indian River Board of Education has approved a series of changes to the 2024-2025 school district calendar.

- The last day of school for students in Grades K-11 will now be **Wednesday, June 11**.
- The last day for preschool will be Tuesday, June 10.
- Final exams at Indian River and Sussex Central high schools will be on Tuesday, June 10 and Wednesday, June 11
- The last day for paraprofessionals will be Thursday, June 12
- Thursday, June 12 will be a remote half grades, half teacher work day for teachers.
- The last day for teachers will be Friday, June 13. (Classroom breakdown day.)
- Remote Infinite Campus training for staff will be held on Monday, June 16

The changes resulted from unused surplus hours built into the calendar when the school day was extended by 20 minutes on March 31.

Did You Know?

Kindergarten registration for 2025-2026 is now open. If your child will be 5 years old on or before August 31, 2025 register now at: irsd.net/students-families/registration

Visit IRSD on Facebook, X and Instagram

Voter Eligibility

Indian River School District residents who are U.S. citizens at least 18 years of age are eligible to vote in the referendum on **June 5, 2025**. Voter registration is not required, but residents must provide proof of identification or residency at each polling place. Residents may vote at any of the eight polling places.

To be eligible to vote, an individual's residence in the Indian River School District must be his or her primary residence.

Absentee ballots may be requested via U.S. Mail until noon on **Friday, May 30**. In-person absentee voting is available at the Department of Elections Sussex County Office until noon on **Wednesday, June 4**. Request for Absentee Ballot forms are available at all district schools. For more information, contact the Department of Elections Sussex County Office at (302) 856-5367 or via email to: absenteesc@delaware.gov.

irsd.net/referendum

State Secretary of Education Honors Six IRSD Students

Congratulations to the following IRSD students for being named Class of 2025 Delaware Secretary of Education Scholars:

Ashly Benavides Lagunas, Indian River High School
Evan Forjan, Indian River High School
Keelie Grez, Sussex Central High School
Lillette Hastings, Sussex Central High School
Claire Hicks, Sussex Central High School
Amelia Meyer, Sussex Central High School



Ashly Benavides



Evan Forjan



Keelie Grez



Lillette Hastings



Claire Hicks



Amelia Meyer

Amanda Howard

From Page 1

At Long Neck Elementary and the Indian River School District, Mrs. Howard has served as a comprehensive induction program mentor, a kindergarten lead teacher, an instructional leadership team member, an Extended School Year teacher and an after-school tutor for kindergarten students. She has also utilized the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to provide targeted interventions for students struggling academically, behaviorally, emotionally and socially.

As the district's Teacher of the Year, she is now eligible for the state Teacher of the Year Award, which will be announced in October.



IRSD Teachers of the Year, 2025-2026

Teacher

Molly Abbott
Ryan Blades
Savannah Cahall
Conor Casey
Jordan Espada
Ryan Goodwin
Lori Hansen
Amanda Howard*
John Jaskewich
Lindsay Kendrick
Sara Powell
Sarah Pringle
Nicholas Tretina
Kristin Turner
Heather Wood

School

Phillip C. Showell Elementary School
 Sussex Central High School
 North Georgetown Elementary School
 Millsboro Middle School
 Southern Delaware School of Arts
 Georgetown Middle School
 IRSD Early Learning Center
 Long Neck Elementary School
 Indian River High School
 East Millsboro Elementary School
 John M. Clayton Elementary School
 Howard T. Ennis School
 Selbyville Middle School
 Georgetown Elementary School
 Lord Baltimore Elementary School

* - Overall winner



2025-2026 IRSD Teachers of the Year. Seated (from left): Sarah Pringle, Kristin Turner, Jordan Espada, Amanda Howard (overall winner), Lori Hansen, Lindsay Kendrick and Savannah Cahall. Standing (from left): Conor Casey, Sara Powell, Heather Wood, John Jaskewich, Ryan Goodwin, Molly Abbott, Ryan Blades and Nicholas Tretina.

Howard Earns High Praise from Colleagues

"Mrs. Howard understands the role that a kindergarten teacher has in nurturing and educating young learners. In my capacity as the former reading specialist, I was able to observe and appreciate the exceptional teaching style and passion that Mrs. Howard exhibits. She has a kind and caring manner, while holding students to high academic and behavioral standards. This results in tremendous growth of the students in her class and a love for school with Mrs. Howard as their teacher."

– Lori Brittingham, assistant principal, North Georgetown Elementary School

"Amanda's never-ending belief in her students allows them to reach their fullest potential not only in the academic setting, but also in all aspects of their lives...Amanda's development of a safe and nurturing classroom environment encourages young learners to attend school and embrace new concepts. Within days of meeting her students, Amanda shows her innate ability to quickly identify a student's current ability level and develop an individual plan to target areas of concern."

– Amanda Cordrey, mental health counselor, Millsboro Middle School

District Staff Earn Awards and Accolades



Allisa Booth of John M. Clayton Elementary School was named 2025 Delaware National Distinguished Principal of the Year. The award was sponsored by the Delaware Association of School Administrators and the National Association of Elementary School Principals.



Matthew Eskridge of Millsboro Middle School was selected as the 2025-2026 Delaware School Counselor of the Year. The award is given annually by the Delaware School Counselor Association.



Michelle Mitchell, a school counselor at Southern Delaware School of the Arts, was named the Indian River School District's Behavioral Health Professional of the Year for 2025.