
Statement for the school committee

Megan Miller <mmiller@arlington.k12.ma.us>
To: Karen Fitzgerald <kfitzgerald@arlington.k12.ma.us>

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Hello Karen!

I hope you are well. I wanted to send along a letter for the school committee in advance of this evening's meeting. I won't be able to attend to read my letter during the public comments, but I was hoping that you might pass my thoughts along to the rest of the committee for consideration.

Thank you for all of the work that you have been doing for the school!
Best,
Megan Miller

Dear Arlington School Committee,

My name is Megan Miller, and I teach 9th and 12th grade English at the high school. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I am writing this to you between my classes today, and I hope that my perspective and experience is helpful as you consider the best course of action for AHS in the second semester.

I am one of the many teachers whose health concerns place them in the high risk category, so I was relieved for the first semester to be able to continue to do the work that I love in a remote setting where I felt I would be safe. Nevertheless, I worried over the summer about whether I would be able to convert all of my curricula to this new digital world. Happily, I have found that remote teaching is going much better than expected, because of all the technology tools made available by the district, as well as the support and hard work of my colleagues. I have been able to find ways to use many of the same best practices in my teaching online as I do in a normal year, such as providing models for students and working with them one-on-one in breakout rooms as they practice, allowing students to collaborate and talk to one another in small group breakout rooms, and providing opportunities for collaborative projects that ask students to engage with texts and each other in new ways.

Unfortunately and counterintuitively, my biggest challenge this semester was finding a way for our in-person reverse field trips to be educationally valuable. I felt at a loss when faced with the many safety restrictions that are so necessary to keep me and my students safe - I could not have them work in groups, share materials, or even turn and talk quietly with a partner to practice their answers before bravely sharing with the rest of the class. Almost all of the best tools in my "teacher toolbox" were off the table. There could be no group posters demonstrating their thinking visually, no small groups huddled together over a passage that they are annotating and picking apart, no leaning over a student's essay with them to help them improve their thesis statement - I had my students in rows six feet apart, with masks on that made it a bit hard to hear each other. The in-person experiences felt, ultimately, to detract from the rich learning that we were engaging in on a regular basis on Zoom.

I know that the in-person time is valuable for students' emotional well-being, (though of course the in-person time simply doesn't look anything like "normal" school). I recognize how vital it is that we insulate our students from the harmful effects of isolation and loneliness. But I also know from my experience that there will be an enormous educational cost to the time spent in small groups in the classroom. That face-to-

face time, though technically together, will in many ways feel more distant than the digital face time we have been experiencing.

It is for these reasons that I hope the Department Shift Model is chosen for our second semester. I believe that of the options available, it allows for the best balance of educational and social needs. With cases of COVID rising precipitously, and knowing what I do about the possibilities of both remote and socially-distant teaching, I believe that the Department Shift Model allows teachers to continue to build on the work we have done this semester while also giving students more regularly scheduled in-person experiences. After talking about the options with my classes, I can also attest to how many of my students crave consistency and routine, and expressed the hope that their schedule would remain as close to the current model as possible. I hope that my perspective here is helpful, and that you will choose the Department Shift Model for semester 2.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter!

Happy Holidays,

Megan Miller

Megan Miller (she/her)

English Teacher

Arlington High School

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