
In regards to proposed hybrid models for AHS second semester

Joy Danison <jdanison@me.com>

Thu, Dec 10, 2020 at 2:34 PM

To: jmorgan@arlington.k12.ma.us, whayner@arlington.k12.ma.us, pschlichtman@arlington.k12.ma.us, kallisonampe@arlington.k12.ma.us, lextan@arlington.k12.ma.us, lkardon@arlington.k12.ma.us, jthielman@arlington.k12.ma.us

Cc: Karen Fitzgerald <kfitzgerald@arlington.k12.ma.us>, Matthew Janger <mjanger@arlington.k12.ma.us>, Superintendent Bodie <aps_superintendent@arlington.k12.ma.us>

Dear School Committee members,

We would like to add our voices in support of the Departmental Shift model that has been recommended by Drs. Janger and Bodie for the second semester program at AHS, beginning in February. While the current all-remote model is not ideal, and certainly not what we would choose for our 9th grade daughter were there not a pandemic in play, it has provided a consistent schedule of teacher-student contact and direct instructional time that has proved extremely beneficial during these uncertain and challenging times.

We believe the Departmental Shift model would build upon what has been working this semester for our daughter and for many of her friends. It maintains the level of direct instructional time of the current model, while increasing the opportunities our daughter would have for some in-person instruction and social interaction with her peers. It allows our daughter to maintain her current schedule for second semester, which is also important to us. As a participant in the math bypass program, she currently benefits from the opportunity to take advanced honors-level courses in math alongside many juniors and seniors. She has worked hard for that opportunity over the past three years, and she could lose it if the schedule has to be revamped; if course offerings are limited; or if 9th and 10th graders are separated from 11th and 12th graders, as proposed by some of the other hybrid models.

We also believe that the Departmental Shift model places the least additional burden on our high school teachers, and gives them the freedom and the bandwidth to expand upon what they are currently doing and what is working well. Time and energy are finite, and our teachers have already had to revamp many of the ways that they teach, along with their entire coursework, to fit into the current remote, semesterized schedule. Rather than asking them to revamp it all again for the second semester, we would prefer they spend the time and energy connecting with our daughter and with other students and improving upon what is working in this first semester. The Departmental Shift model seems most conducive to this aim.

To be clear, the current model is not perfect. Our daughter feels underwhelmed and unchallenged academically and of course longs for more social interaction with her peers, as we all do. But we don't believe that the other two hybrid models that have been proposed — the four-cohort model and the grade-shift two-cohort model — would solve those issues. On the contrary, by reducing the amount of direct instructional time, we fear that the academic piece would suffer even more. We strongly believe that more hours of independent work/study time/asynchronous instruction would be detrimental to our daughter's education. By increasing demands on our teachers, we believe they would have less time to spend reaching out to our daughter and other students and diversifying the curriculum for students of varying levels. The trade-offs of the other two proposed models are just not worth it, in our opinion.

As for the social interaction piece, when we talk with our daughter, we find that what she truly wants is more social interaction without the constraints of the pandemic. She doesn't want more time in a school building maintaining six feet of distance. She wants to be able to connect with her peers without masks and without distancing. At this stage of the game — nine months in — it's perhaps what we all want, deep down. But our daughter realizes, as we do, that it is just not possible at this point. So far this semester, she has participated in two reverse field trips and freshman orientation, as well as some socially distanced conditioning practices for the girls' swim team in late summer. Those have been positive experiences for her. She has expressed to us her strong preference for the Departmental Shift model, as it allows her to have some increased social interaction without sacrificing instructional time and academics. And in the meantime, as we all wait for a vaccine, she will continue to reach out and connect with her friends in safe ways, by taking walks through town with masks on or gathering in backyards with patio heaters for games of cards and movies.

Thank you for considering our thoughts on this matter. We recognize the very difficult decisions before you, and we are extremely grateful to you for your service on behalf of our family along with many other families, our schools and our entire town.

Sincerely,

Joy and Doug Danison

Parents to Naomi (9th grade, AHS); Saideh (7th grade, Ottoson); and Matthew (4th grade, Stratton)