

**Superintendent Bodie, Assistant Superintendent MacNeal
and Members of the School Committee,**

Introductions of Principals:

- Thad Dingman, Dallin Elementary School
- Karen Donato, Thompson Elementary School
- Mark McAneny, Bishop Elementary School
- Andrew Ahmadi, Peirce Elementary School
- Michael Hanna, Stratton Elementary School
- Stephanie Zerchykov, Brackett Elementary School
- Kate Peretz, Hardy Elementary School.

Thank you everyone for the opportunity to have this conversation about our schools. We continue to be grateful for your support of our work, as well as for the opportunity to provide leadership in a district that values a high quality educational experience for their children. From all that we've experienced in Arlington, this fact has been unwavering. It is of particular importance to note this during what has become our most challenging year to date. COVID-19 and the impact of the global pandemic will be felt by our community for years to come. We will focus on our response to this throughout our presentation this evening.

But first, we would like to open our presentation with a short expression of appreciation for the funding initiatives from last year.

It may be difficult to remember after so much has happened since March, but we started the 2019-2020 school year with specialist teachers dedicated to each elementary building in the areas of art, music, and physical education. This was a major investment in personnel and one that had an immediate and incredibly positive impact on our schedule and our students. We were able to create a system in each school that allowed for:

- The addition of a weekly common planning time for teachers to work with building principals, coaches and district leadership
- A predictable classroom schedule each day for all students K-5 with a common planning time for classroom teachers every day
- Additional enrichment opportunities for students K-3 in art, music, PE, and library
- Additional enrichment opportunities for students in grades 4 and 5 in the areas of digital literacy, chorus, and instrumental music.

The additional weekly common planning time was facilitated by the building principals and was named the ACE Block. ACE stands for Assessment, Collaboration, and Evidence, and comes from the text *Data Wise*. The creation of this time in the schedule for administrators and educators has become a critical piece to developing our data culture. The progress made from September to March was noteworthy, and was only interrupted, as the rest of the world was interrupted, by COVID. Meeting to discuss student outcomes and to create instructional plans based on evidence will need to be a priority heading into the unknowns of the coming school year.

In this new and unusual educational setting, The ACE block has had to be adjusted significantly; we have not been able to meet with every grade every week to monitor progress and design interventions. However, we have already learned from our experiences throughout these past 9 months. While issues of equity were at the forefront pre-COVID, they have become even more pronounced. While our focus on early literacy was growing pre-COVID, our sense of urgency is now even more pronounced. While we were concerned about growing anxiety and the social-emotional needs of our students pre-COVID, our concerns in these areas are first and foremost in our minds as we start and end every school day now.

Thankfully, other supports from the previous budget cycle have put us in a good place to meet the needs of our students moving forward. With the support of our community, last year we also made major investments by adding:

- Assistant Principals at two of our elementary schools
- Reading Specialists
- Math Interventionists
- An elementary librarian and digital learning specialist
- Instructional coaches for science and social studies

As we look to 2021, we need to use the resources put in place to create new, and to maintain the previous, plans to continue to target student need and advance student achievement both equitably and responsibly.

In order to do this work effectively, we have considered the budget plan from past years and have considered the ways the plan must be adjusted moving forward based on data collected in our schools this year. We feel the areas of need at this time are:

- 1.) Reserve teachers and the ability to add teachers based on enrollment in order to maintain a low teacher to student ratio going in to the school year 2021-2022

- a.) Additional professional faculty will be necessary to respond to the anticipated instructional needs of all of our students. We have designed and implemented an impressive version - both hybrid and fully remote - of our typical programming framework. However, we are already aware of learning gaps that have developed across the district, and for particular subgroups of students that could only be remedied with the expert support and targeted instruction of professional faculty members. *(It does not seem feasible to have more instructional needs presenting themselves within all schools, while returning to a student to staff ratio that was appropriate pre-COVID).*
 - b.) Further, we expect to need reserve teachers as our enrollment, primarily in grades K and 1, may be more volatile than typical years. It is expected that we will have a rise in Kindergarten enrollment due to families that withheld their child this year, and it is conceivable that our numbers in first grade will grow as well. Having reserve teachers included in the budget will offer schools the flexibility to offer more teacher level support to these students in every area who have historically been disproportionately impacted, including students of color, English learners, students with learning challenges and disorders, students who require specific curricular interventions, students affected by trauma, and students who are socio economically disadvantaged.
- 2.) Assistant Principals full time at each elementary school
- a.) To best support all students, including those that have struggled in the current models of learning, we need to focus on instructional leadership and the overall management and operations of our buildings. This requires two administrators per building. As we consider next year and the years beyond, it will be imperative that all teachers are supported with instruction which will mean looking closely at student level data and trends (both quantitative and qualitative). We will need to acclimate students back into our buildings who have not been in a school since March 2020. We expect that we will see “gaps,” whether academic, social or emotional that previously did not exist. And it is our opinion that having an administrative team of two at each elementary school allows for us to address the needs of all students as stated above.
 - b.) The need for instructional leadership by our principals was significant before the pandemic, and has become profound during 2020-21. The need to hold teams of collaborative educators together has been a

primary focus. This was essential in order to have consistent programming across a grade, a school and the district. This team of principals is proud of the consistent programming we designed and implemented. In 2021-2022, in order to relaunch schools with even more nuanced programming than ever before, each principal needs an assistant to continue to respond to all of the logistical and administrative needs of the building. There is no other area of work where so few managerial auxiliaries are deployed.

Relevant Data Sets regarding Assistant Principals

For context we are including data that demonstrates *the percentage of schools that have two or more administrators at elementary buildings across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*. For the sets below we have examined K-5 elementary schools with student populations greater than 300, which is reflective of all of the elementary schools in APS. Further, we have looked closely at elementary schools “Top 20%” and the “Top 10%” which refers to the 2019 Accountability Percentile.

All K-5 Elementary Schools in MA with Enrollment greater than 300

Enrollment	Number of Schools with at least 1 AP	Total Schools	Percent of Schools with at least 1 AP
>300	126	191	70.0%
>450	66	74	89.1%

K-5 Elementary Schools (“Top 20% of schools in the state”)

*Four out of seven APS elementary schools met this criteria in 2019

Enrollment	Number of Schools with at least 1 AP	Total Schools	Percent of Schools with at least 1 AP
>300	45	71	63.3%
>450	24	28	85.7%

K-5 Elementary Schools (“Top 10% of schools in the state”)

*None of the seven APS elementary schools met this criteria in 2019

Enrollment	Number of Schools with at least 1 AP	Total Schools	Percent of Schools with at least 1 AP

>300	27	41	65.9%
>450	15	16	93.8%

3.) K-5 Coordinator of Reading Curriculum and Instruction

As we have learned across the elementary schools over the past couple of years, the science of learning to read is becoming more and more apparent to practitioners and policymakers alike. It is a unique set of assessments and instructional practices that lead to all students reading proficiently. As stated in a district-wide meeting with Dr. Melissa Orkin, quoting Stephen Pinker:

“Children are wired for sound, but print is an optional accessory that must be painstakingly bolted on.”

Given this profound shift in our understanding of teaching and learning to read, we must have a district level coordinator focused exclusively on the development and implementation of appropriate assessment frameworks, common protocols for analyzing results, and professional learning around instructional best practices.

We invite you to continue the conversation and invite you to ask any questions you may have.

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