

**Budget priorities: Elementary Level
December 19, 2019**

**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, Karen Hartley, Peirce Elementary School, Michael Hanna, Stratton Elementary School, Stephanie Zerchykov, Brackett Elementary School, and Kate Peretz, Hardy Elementary School.

Thank you everyone for the opportunity to have this conversation about our schools. We are grateful for the continued support of our work, as well as the opportunity to provide leadership in a district that values a high quality educational experience for children. From all that we've experienced in Arlington, this fact has been unwavering.

We would like to open this year with a short expression of appreciation for the financial support of our initiatives from last year. We have a story to tell, and it begins in FY20. In the first year of the multi-year plan, school funding was provided for many things. We would like to highlight three areas that we found especially important to our work.

These are:

- Increased staffing of specialists in the areas of art, music, PE, and library
- Additional Assistant Principals
- Additional Coaches to support our curriculum.

An increase in specialist FTEs was the greatest investment at the elementary level last year. The impact of this investment was immediate and very positive. Right away, we heard from teachers that the set and predictable daily schedule, with regular and reliable common planning times, was making planning at the start of the year much more efficient and productive. The additional time to work as a grade level team with administrators has also been incredibly effective in supporting collaborative practices. We spent the first part of the year establishing our goals and expectations for these ACE Block times. ACE stands for Assessment, Collaboration, and Evidence (as taken from the Data Wise text). We have established norms, created shared goals, and have

begun using data collected in classrooms to improve teaching and learning from kindergarten to grade 5. This has been a key criteria for success when it comes to our goal of narrowing the achievement gap and meeting the needs of all learners in a community that is becoming increasingly more diverse and complex as the years progress.

The new schedule and the addition of several specialists at the elementary level also means we are able to offer enriching opportunities for our students while we meet as adults to discuss their needs. In kindergarten through grade 3, the students are participating in an additional quarter of music, art, PE, and library. At the upper levels, students are now a part of digital literacy classes and a grade level chorus. We hope to continue to expand this part of the day in the years to come to include greater choice for our students. We are appreciative that our specialists, librarian, and digital learning instructor are creating engaging programming to deliver to our students each week.

Assistant Principals support our schools in many important ways. They will continue to be critical to the development of our new school structures and schedules, especially when it comes to the added ACE Blocks and the time it takes to look at data and make sound decisions that target our sub groups and individual students in their learning.

The addition of coaches over several budget cycles, in particular for social studies and science in this past year, are also critical resources for us as we work toward meeting our instructional goals. Coaches have been invited to ACE blocks, have developed lessons to be used in classrooms, and have promoted grade level professional development in addition to working 1:1 with educators. The “A” in ACE is for assessment, and our coaches are working very closely with teachers to assess students and use this data to inform instruction. Some of these assessments are new, and the coaches are providing support, as well as a critical eye and opinion, so the data is helpful and not simply more work for both adults and children.

This year, the elementary principal team continues to approach budget requests with a multiple year view. Rather than look at FY21 in isolation, we once again considered the district priorities, requests from our faculty, our leadership emphases, funding commitments from last year, and the resources that we have and need to support students and teachers in demonstrating success and high achievement.

We emphasize a vision for how our elementary schools can and should be resourced so that we can say we are leading Safe and Supportive Schools for all students, schools where high quality teaching and professional learning are a priority; schools where each

child has the opportunity to achieve at a high level, and all families in the town are benefiting from their investment in our schools.

Our budgetary requests are designed to enhance and support the work we have already started, and continue that work with some additions. Any changes we are suggesting in the multi-year plan are based on what we have learned so far during this school year. We are very much aware that we must be financially conservative in our requests. Any suggestions for an increase are made with an overall vision of student success that includes social-emotional and academic development.

While we work on all areas of the curriculum every day, and our goals cover all curricular areas, our focus at this point in time is literacy. The data we have collected, both summative and formative, points us to reading and an ever increasing sense of urgency over our ability to narrow the achievement gap in reading. Working together with our reading departments, special educators, and general education classroom teachers, we are using assessments to target individual needs at the elementary level. Our first graders have already been assessed using new methods and targeted lessons have been used in classrooms that were introduced by our literacy coaches. We are creating a wealth of data to support our practice, and the time now allowed to us to talk about this data and make decisions about next steps for students is invaluable. A restructuring of some of our reading department staff is needed at this time to fully support this programming. Our plan would bring our highly qualified reading staff into alignment with more equitable staffing ratios at each elementary school.

The budget requests are listed here, with the Line Items from the current 5 year plan, as applicable. The first four items are requested for FY21 (APs, reading support, and administrative staff). The remaining items on the list are put forward for your consideration in FY21 and beyond. Equity in staffing between departments and at schools, should be considered as we move forward.

Elementary Staffing Model & Increase in FTE (prioritized by enrollment and building/district administration)	FY 20 (funded)	FY 21 (request)
Assistant Principals: (Line Item 44)	1.5 FTE Total:	2.0 FTE Total:
Reading Department Staff	-	2.1 FTE
Administrative Support (Line item 35)	-	1.0 FTE
BSPs (Behavior Support Specialists)	-	2.0 FTE
Math Interventionist (Line Item 43)	-	1.0 FTE
BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)	-	1.0 FTE
Special Education Learning Specialists (Line Item 36)	-	1.0 FTE
Full time Occupational Therapists (Line Item 27)	.4 FTE	.5 FTE

The staffing model we are presenting considers the day to day experience of our students and teachers, and also the district priorities that we are supporting as an administrative team. Highest on the list are:

- Equity amongst schools as it relates to literacy support and
- Assistant Principals

We believe the overall needs of our schools are also continuing to grow as enrollment increases. What will be important to continue to consider are the need for:

- Increased administrative support due to continued student growth and daily building demands, including building safety

- Aligned, high-quality instruction that supports significant and ongoing curriculum reform and improvement
- Continued focus on Safe and Supportive Schools (SASS).

We believe the items listed are of the most immediate need in terms of staffing requests. We continue to support the multi-year plan in the ways it addresses other areas such as salary increases, materials and professional development.

Here are some additional programming requests that would strengthen curriculum and instruction, that we are also considering:

- 1.0 ELL Teacher
- 1.0 Library Media Specialist
- 1.0 Digital Learning Specialist
- 1.0 Social Studies Coach, Elementary Level
- 1.0 Science Coach, Elementary Level
- 1.0 Literacy Coach, Elementary Level
- 1.0 Math Coach, Elementary Level
- 1.0 Physical Therapy Assistant
- 0.5 Team Chair, Elementary Level

One last request is to highlight the continued need for a review of staffing at the classroom level and within our special education department. These line items are in the multi-year plan and we ask for your continued support in maintaining low and equitable numbers across our schools.

We can now take a moment to continue the conversation and answer questions, and also speak about the experiences in our schools that may underscore the importance of each staffing request.