

Superintendent's Entry Plan Report and Findings



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Arlington Public Schools
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Dear Arlington Public Schools Community,

It is my pleasure to provide the Arlington community with this Entry Plan Findings Report, which is a culmination of nearly a year of data collection, analysis, and conversations with families, students, and staff of the Arlington Public Schools, as well as members of the Arlington Community.

From the time I began in the role of Superintendent of the Arlington Public Schools, I knew Arlington was a special place with a lot to offer students. Since that time, this knowledge has only been reinforced. My transition has allowed me to approach the role with an open mind and heart, and to center the needs of Arlington's young minds in my entry to this important leadership position.

Overall, my transition work focused on identifying:

1. the strengths of the district;
2. the systems and traditions already in place that should be protected and enhanced;
and
3. the district's most important and acute challenges.

In this report, I provide some of the findings and future directions that I have uncovered during the past six months of superintendency. I share how students, families, staff, and community members have helped me get to know the Arlington Public Schools, and I attempt to balance the individual stories with the aggregate data and reports I have reviewed.

Overall, my transition has revealed that I have joined a community full of kind, collaborative, and knowledgeable people who are committed to providing the resources necessary for an excellent education. While this report also discusses some of the things we can do to improve the Arlington Public Schools experience for all stakeholders, I am confident that we can collaboratively address some of the challenges and opportunities articulated in this report. I continue to be humbled by the opportunity to serve in this important role, and I thank you in advance for your continued partnership as we look forward to a bright future for Arlington's youth.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elizabeth C. Homan
Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools

Entry Plan Findings: Overview and Methods

This report is organized based on the current [overarching goals](#) of the Arlington Public Schools, in four sections:

1. Student Achievement;
2. Staff Excellence and Professional Development;
3. Resources, Infrastructure and Educational Environment; and
4. Operations, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.

In each section, I describe how the data collected during my entry process demonstrate areas of strength and areas for further growth and future focus in the Arlington Public Schools.

Importantly, the goal of this report is *not* to articulate priorities and initiatives for the Arlington Public Schools; this will be the work of Phase Four. Instead, this report is meant to highlight those elements of the APS system that are strengths upon which we can draw in order to address what I believe to be some of the schools' most acute upcoming challenges as we emerge from an unprecedented two years of pandemic education. This report, alongside other reports and analysis, will inform the collaborative work of stakeholders to imagine the future for Arlington's public school system.

The findings of this entry plan are based on data and documentation collected beginning in February 2021-January 2022. For each finding in the plan, I provide examples of data supporting my findings from multiple sources, including:

- 20 Focus Groups with APS Students, K-12;
- 7 Family Listening Sessions, open to all APS Families;
- 7 Staff Listening Sessions, open to all APS Staff;
- 1-on-1 Entry Meetings with APS Administrators;
- Visits to every APS school, with classroom walkthroughs;
- Fall 2020 and 2021 Culture and Climate Surveys;
- Achievement and Accountability data for the Arlington Public Schools;
- Previously-conducted reviews and audits of the school system; and
- Previous and current APS Budgets and Financial Reports.

This list is not exhaustive, and the full range of my entry activities can be found in my [Superintendent's Entry Plan](#). The findings in this report have been additionally informed by the conversations and connections I have made each day in my first six months of work as the Superintendent of Schools. Quantitative and qualitative data have been triangulated in the development of this report in order to identify themes across datasets and groups of stakeholders.

Student Achievement: Planning for Excellence and Equity

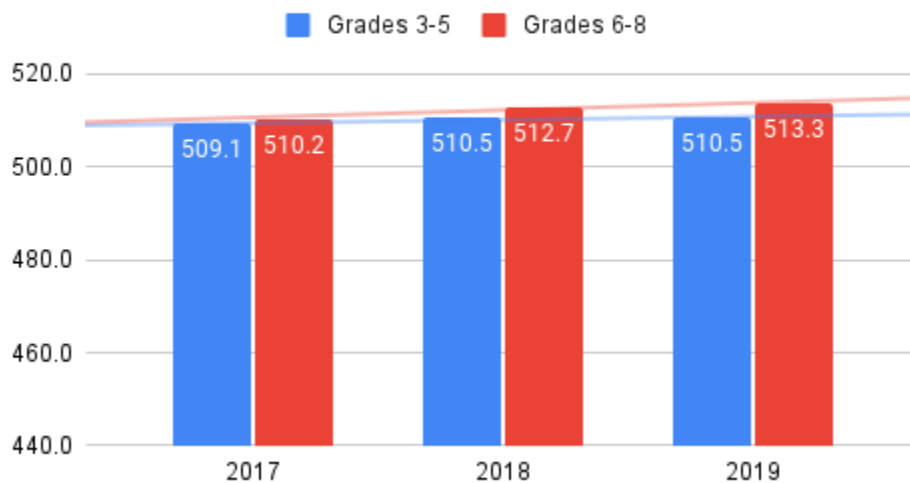
The Arlington Public Schools prides itself on providing an excellent public education for students, and high achievement over time demonstrates the impact of Arlington’s commitment to academic excellence. In this section, I will share areas of strength and opportunities for continued improvement related to the district’s commitment to student learning and academic achievement.

Strengths to Build Upon: Exceeding and Meeting Academic Expectations with an Emphasis on Equity and Social-Emotional Learning

In 2019, the last year in which the state published accountability reports, Arlington Public Schools made “Substantial Progress Toward Targets,” exceeding or meeting targets in mathematics in Grades 3-8 across subgroups and demonstrating consistently high achievement in ELA in Grades 3-8 over multiple years:

Mathematics achievement - MCAS average composite scaled score - GRADES 3-8				
Group	2018 Achievement	2019 Achievement	Change	Status
All Students	507.4	509.8	2.4	Exceeded
Lowest Performing	485.2	489.3	4.1	Exceeded
High needs	494.1	495.9	1.8	Exceeded
Econ. Disadvantaged	489.3	492.4	3.1	Exceeded
Students w/ disabilities	489.2	491.1	1.9	Met
Asian	513.4	516.5	3.1	Exceeded
White	508.2	510.4	2.2	Exceeded

ELA Achievement, Grades 3-5 and Grades 6-8



The district's commitment to high expectations and educational excellence was mirrored in conversations with students, families, and teachers as well, who shared their pride in Arlington's strong academic programming:

APS Students Describe How Teachers Hold them to High Expectations

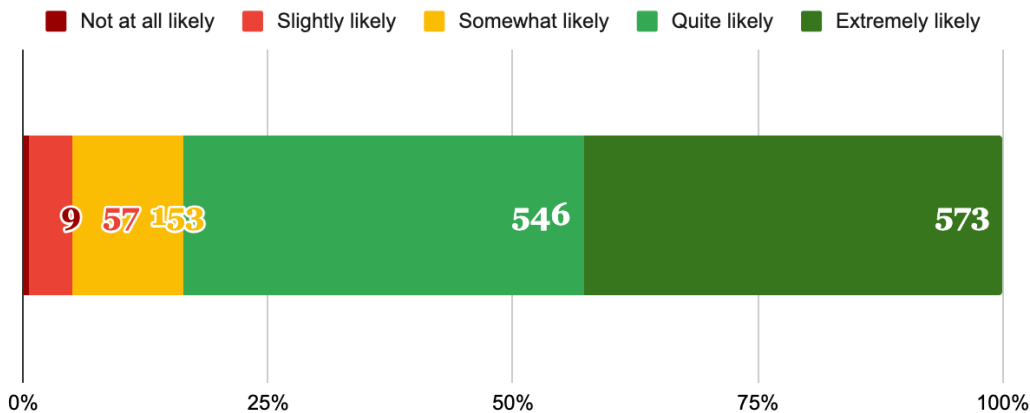
Student 1: If you're struggling, they'll come over as quick as possible.
 Student 2: And they'll help you work through it.
 Student 3: No matter how long or short [it is]

All of my favorite teachers that I can think of have classroom environments that were always immersive and full of different activities, and they would do stuff to try to actively engage people.

Instead of just sitting and taking notes on something like you're doing a weeklong project about, like, you're getting involved, and that's been really fun.

[Teachers] don't focus much on the grade. They focus on your actual education.

Students, Fall 2021: When you feel like giving up, how likely is it that your teacher will make you keep trying?



The district has also dedicated significant resources to improving instructional equity for all students; these efforts have included:

- Investing in specialists in order to create built-in time for elementary grade-level teams to continuously plan together and use data to improve instruction;
- Offering graduate-level racial equity in education courses to educators; 97 teachers have participated and another 50 teachers will participate this school year;
- Invited scholars of color and experts in racial equity in education to speak to the community;
- Diversifying texts in ELA curriculum and APS school libraries; and

- Focusing on topics of race and equity in district-offered professional learning.

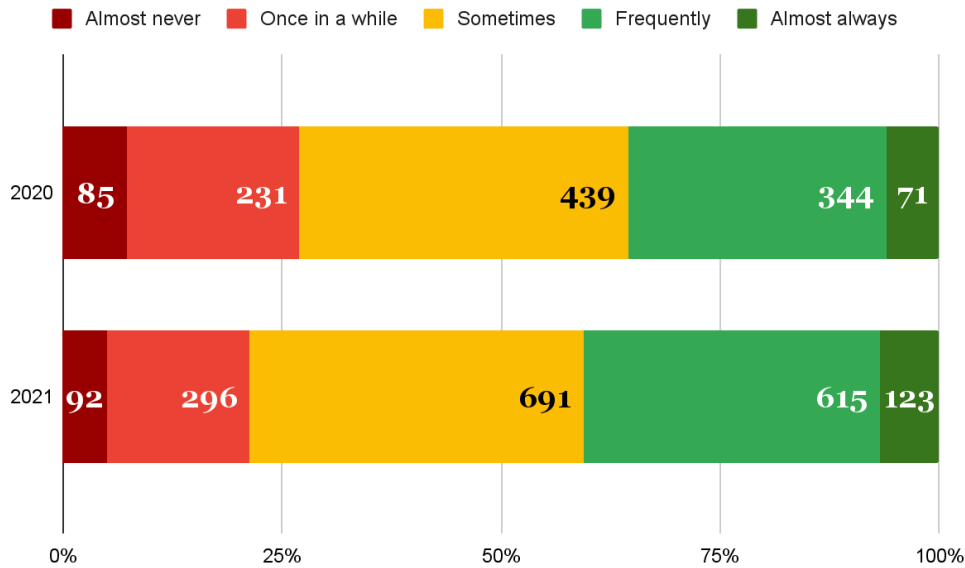
The impact of these efforts are evident to students, teachers, and families, who have shared their positive feedback in focus groups and surveys about the district’s efforts surrounding improvements in instructional equity and closing achievement gaps:

Stakeholders Discuss APS Equity Work

<p style="text-align: center;">APS Staff</p> <p>What I try to do is make sure that we’re bringing in all different kinds of stories, so that kids are getting a chance to have characters students identify with and characters who don’t represent their kind of life or way of living. We let them tell us who they are, we don’t tell them who they are.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">APS Student</p> <p>I was going to say that teachers should be addressing big things like [race] because, it’s not only just in Arlington, that racism [is] happening around. It’s worldwide. So it’s good for teachers to address it to kids, so they know why.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">APS Family Member</p> <p>I hope APS will continue the commitment to and work around diversity and inclusion. There should be overt dedication to diversifying the curriculum.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">APS Students: What Makes a Great Teacher?</p> <p>“Having difficult conversations instead of just ignoring that stuff entirely and just providing a space”</p> <p>“Doesn’t let people get away with like jokes or insensitive comments.”</p>

Furthermore, students have reported that over the past year, the impact of this continued focus on racial equity has resulted in more opportunities at school to think deeply about race-related topics and discuss those topics with peers, a testament to the work APS educators have put into having meaningful conversations with students about topics related to race and identity:

Students, 2020-21; At your school, how often are you encouraged to think more deeply about race-related topics?



The district has also spent significant time prioritizing students’ social and emotional learning and wellness, adding leadership roles to the district alongside comprehensive programming to support positive classroom environments and students’ overall wellness. For example, since 2017, the district has:

- Expanded leadership in Social and Emotional Wellness with the addition of a Director of Counseling and SEL and an SEL Coach;
- Expanded implementation of Responsive Classroom pedagogy and routines across K-6 buildings;
- Applied for and been awarded \$200,000 over three years from the Arlington Education Foundation to implement initiatives aligned with MA DESE’s Safe and Supportive Schools Frameworks; and
- Participated in DESE-facilitated PLCs focused on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), positive behavior international systems (PBIS), and social-emotional learning (SEL).

Beginning in 2020, the district has been piloting new tools to capture information about students’ mental health and social and emotional competencies. APS has administered SEL and mental health screeners to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These assessments provide valuable insights about the mental health needs of students and students’ SEL competencies and areas for growth.

Opportunities for Future Focus: Elementary Literacy, Persistent Achievement Gaps, and Defining Instructional Equity

Arlington boasts a strong track record of academic excellence, with opportunities for students to follow their passions and experience a well-rounded program throughout their PreK-12 experience. There are also areas that will require sustained work over the next several years in order for APS to continue offering an excellent education for all students. In this section, I will articulate two focus areas related to the domain of academic excellence.

Opportunity #1: Continued focus on Elementary Literacy and ELA

For the past three years, the Arlington Public Schools has focused on the role of early foundational literacy skills on academic achievement and later success. This work has included:

- Professional development for special education, general education, literacy, and coaching staff on the science of reading;
- Integration of phonics instruction using the curriculum resources Foundations and Heggerty to develop students’ phonics and phonemic awareness skills in grades K-3; and
- Implementation of the DIBELS suite of assessments in grades K-3.

During this time, the district has also expanded its investment in Heineman’s *Units of Study* curriculum resources for core ELA instruction and expanded literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies coaching at the elementary level.

In 2019 (the last year accountability findings were reported), the district improved towards targets for all groups of students; however, unlike in Mathematics where all groups of students exceeded targets, in ELA not all groups of students met targets in ELA in grades K-8, indicating areas for future and continued focus for the district:

ELA achievement - MCAS average composite scaled score - GRADES 3-8				
Group	2018 Achievement	2019 Achievement	Change	Status
All Students	511	511.4	0.4	Met Target
Lowest Performing	488.2	490.1	1.9	Improved Below Target
High needs	495.4	495.9	0.5	Improved Below Target
Econ. Disadvantaged	494.3	495.1	0.8	Met Target
Students w/ disabilities	490.3	491.7	1.4	Met Target
Asian	513.4	514.2	0.8	Exceeded Target
White	512.1	512.4	0.3	Met Target

From 2019-2021 (during the pandemic), achievement gaps in ELA were exacerbated by disruptions in the learning environment and consistent access for all students to critical

school resources and additional interventions. Furthermore, formative assessments conducted in Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 indicate gaps in both foundational and complex literacy skills in 2021 compared to 2020, particularly in areas critical to the development of higher-order literacy skills such as comprehension of informational texts:

Reading Assessment Performance: Fall 2020 - Fall 2021 (iReady)						
3rd Grade	% of Students Performing Mid or Above Grade Level THIRD GRADE		% of Students Performing Mid or Above Grade Level FOURTH GRADE		% of Students Performing Mid or Above Grade Level FIFTH GRADE	
	Fall (20)	Fall (21)	Fall (20)	Fall (21)	Fall (20)	Fall (21)
Phonological Awareness	99%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Phonics	83%	81%	92%	89%	95%	95%
High-Frequency Words	97%	97%	99%	100%	99%	100%
Vocabulary	56%	50%	48%	45%	39%	35%
Comprehension: Literature	61%	60%	60%	62%	56%	49%
Comprehension: Informational Text	55%	50%	52%	49%	44%	37%

Leaders, families, and teachers all discussed the positive impact of the district’s shared efforts to improve foundational literacy resources and instruction in alignment with recent research on reading. These efforts have been collaborative, coordinated, strategic, and their impact is evident in student outcomes.

The next step in this work will be to evaluate and adjust ELA core curriculum resources to ensure that they support the development of students’ vocabulary and content knowledge and ability to comprehend rich informational texts, all skills that are crucial to success in middle school, high school, college, and career. According to the Massachusetts’ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s CURATE reviews and [EdReports](#), a reputable curriculum review organization, the current APS elementary core curriculum resource, *Units of Study*, “does not meet expectations” in several domains.

In addition to the DESE, stakeholders who participated in focus groups shared concerns about the curriculum *Units of Study*: one parent shared in a focus group that “the district should embrace evidence-based early literacy instruction,” and a teacher in the district said

“at the elementary level we have Lucy Calkins, which is not the greatest for English Learners across the board... It’s not language-rich. We almost have to take it apart and put whole things that are not there.” Furthermore, in a 2021 report, a group of parents who identify as “The Arlington Special Education Alliance” wrote, “We are upset about this ongoing expansion [of *Units of Study*] in light of the poor reading outcomes for third graders and the shortfalls of the Lucy Calkins curriculum in general.”

Ongoing efforts to improve early literacy instruction in the Arlington Public Schools should take advantage of the collaborative and inclusive approach to systems change on which APS prides itself. Furthermore, these efforts must be supportive of the efforts of Arlington’s educators, who have put extensive time into developing a robust approach to early foundational literacy instruction. The district has an opportunity to build on its success with early foundational literacy and keep those elements of the curriculum that are demonstrating significant gains for students, and to consider researching and piloting alternatives to core ELA resources, specifically *Units of Study*.

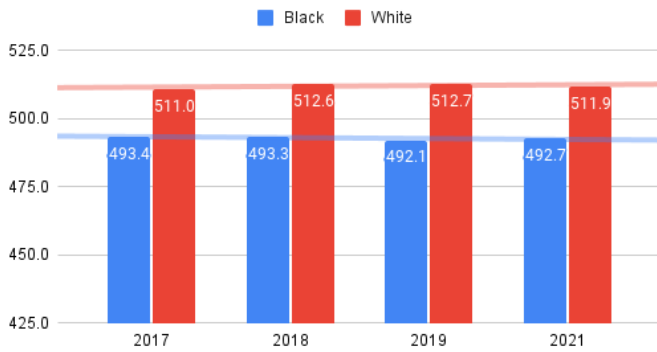
Opportunity #2: Addressing Persistent Achievement Gaps and Defining Instructional Equity

It has been clear throughout my entry process that the Arlington Public Schools has invested significant time and resources into improving equity of outcomes for all students. The 2019 [5-year budget plan](#) developed in collaboration with the administration and school committee articulated funding priorities directly intended to close the achievement gap, and Arlington educators, families, and students expressed the importance of a continued focus on equity, particularly racial equity.

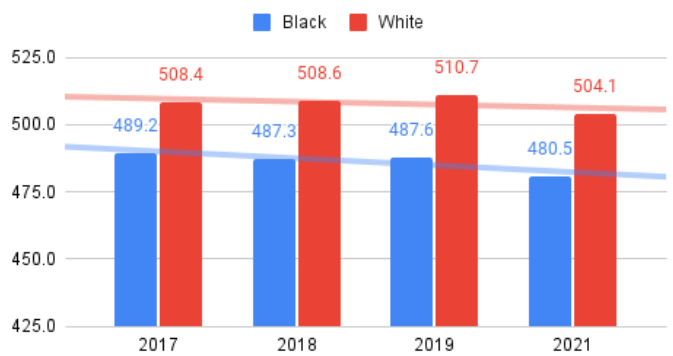
The district has consistently presented disaggregated data that highlights where opportunity and achievement gaps persist, and in Fall of 2021, school leaders publicly shared School Improvement Plans designed to name and address persistent equity challenges at their schools. Before the pandemic, the district engaged leaders in high-quality professional development on how to use data for continuous improvement; leaders shared appreciation for these learning opportunities and a desire for more collaboration on school improvement planning in the future.

Continuous improvement planning focused on achievement and opportunity gaps is also important system-wide; analysis of both academic and experiential outcomes demonstrates that some students, families, and teachers have a more positive experience in the Arlington Public Schools than their peers, particularly those peers in historically marginalized groups. For example, an analysis of mathematics and ELA achievement reveals widening gaps for students who identify as Black. Gaps are similarly persistent or growing for students on IEPs, students from economically disadvantaged households, and students who are considered “High Needs.”

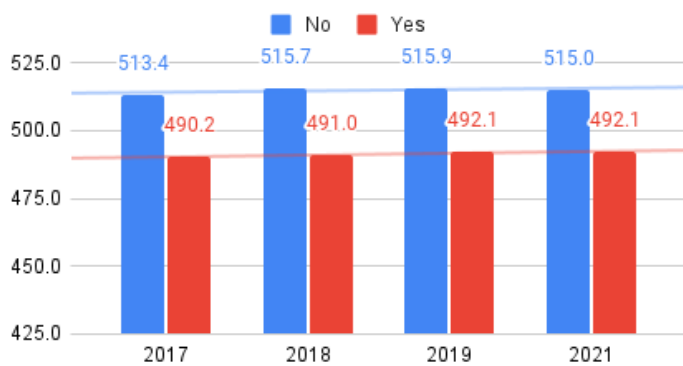
2017-2020 ELA Ave Scaled Score, Grades 3-8



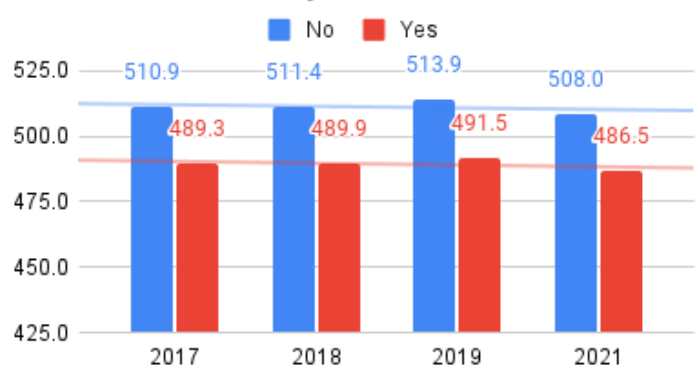
2017-2021 Math Ave Scaled Score, Grades 3-8



2017-2021 ELA by IEP, Grades 3-8



2017-2021 Math by IEP, Grades 3-8



Achievement gaps are “lagging indicators,” meaning that summative assessment data can provide educators with an opportunity to reflect on what has already happened and its impact. In order to address gaps, however, attention must shift to “leading indicators,” or data that allow for immediate action and adjustment of practice, such as analysis of student work, common formative assessments, and building common language about what is expected in instruction. The district’s recent investment in teacher-driven common planning time embedded in the school day (elementary) has the potential to be a space for such collaboration and conversation around real-time formative data; expanding these efforts to the secondary level may allow all teachers to engage in collaboration focused on improving and building consistency across core instruction. A data-driven approach to decision-making and budget-planning will also allow the district to identify and address opportunity gaps *before* they manifest as achievement gaps on standardized assessments, by identifying obstacles that deny access to some opportunities for some APS students and families.

While most students shared positive experiences connecting with teachers and adults in APS, it is an important precondition to academic achievement that all students and their families feel included and valued by the Arlington Public Schools. However, families’ and

students' school experiences did not always meet this precondition. In Fall 2021 Culture and Climate Surveys, students who identify as Black and students who identify as Asian indicated that they feel less respected, more frequently bullied, and less respected by adults than their white peers. In a focus group, one High School Student shared the impact of recent curriculum diversification efforts in a focus group:

We read the book *Fences* or books about Black Americans. But a lot of those books really focus on kind of traumatic experiences. And I mean, it's important that students learn about it, but... I'm just getting repeatedly re-explained to me parts of my own negative experience."

Families also shared how the public school system can be challenging to navigate for parents who are new to Arlington or who come from diverse socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. For example, families said:

- "The structures of the schools themselves privileges people with a lot of income and flexibility;"
- "Arlington is still divided in many ways, there is an aspect of inequity when it comes to living in Arlington and affording to live in Arlington;" and
- "APS needs to do more with racial literacy, with earlier talking about racial justice issues. This needs to happen before students are beginning to form cliques."

APS teachers also expressed a need for continued focus on inequity in the system. One APS teacher in a focus group summed up a discussion about the impact of inequity on students by saying, "let's really examine how all of us contribute to inequity." Teachers in focus groups advocated for, among other things:

- Elimination of fees for extracurriculars such as athletics and instrumental programming;
- More resources for communicating with families in their home languages;
- More opportunities for creative and interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students; and
- Expanded focus on teacher professional development on specific instructional strategies that improve equity of outcomes.

Teachers felt all of these actions would begin to address opportunity gaps for their students. One teacher and APS alumna shared, "I graduated from AHS and I have seen ways the district has changed for the better. We need continued conversation and action around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and affinity groups."

In order to eliminate persistent opportunity and achievement gaps, the data suggest a need for long-range plans that will proactively address critical areas of need and barriers to opportunity for students and families. To this end, the district has already partnered with the Arlington Education Foundation and other community organizations to work with a diverse group of stakeholders in Spring 2022-Fall 2022 to develop a comprehensive district strategic plan. This collaboratively-developed plan will articulate benchmarks for success

and be monitored and adjusted as needed, and will be developed in partnership with a diverse group of APS stakeholders, including educators, families, students, and community members. Additionally, initiatives focused on addressing achievement gaps will be reflected in School Improvement Plans and present throughout professional learning offerings for educators.

Teaching and learning is the heart of any school district, and the Arlington Public Schools have a strong foundation of academic excellence upon which to build in future years. In the following three overarching goal areas, I will describe how the systems of the Arlington Public Schools can build upon strengths in order to continue supporting teaching and learning in APS.

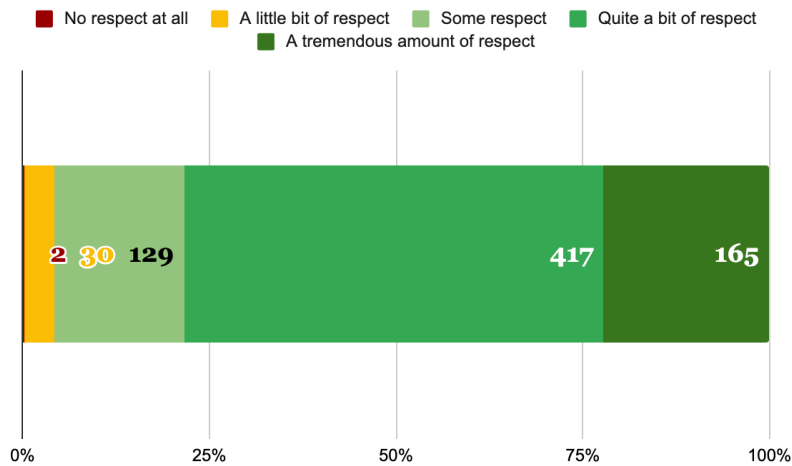
Staff Excellence and Professional Development: Cultivating a Collaborative Adult Culture

I have been impressed throughout my transition process by the exceptional and dedicated staff of the Arlington Public Schools. In order to meet the needs of all students, APS's talented staff require an environment that is supportive of adult learning and continuous professional growth and holds all educators to high expectations. In an early conversation with one APS administrator, I was asked what kind of workplace I like to foster as a leader. My answer came easy: I like to lead organizations where all staff feel empowered with the knowledge and support to do what is right and best for their students and colleagues. In this section, I will describe the strengths and opportunities for the Arlington Public Schools in the domain of Staff Excellence and Professional Development.

Strengths to Build Upon: A Staff Culture of Mutual Respect and Collegiality

Throughout my transition activities, APS teachers expressed how much they value their colleagues and the collaborative staff culture of the Arlington Public Schools. There is a strong sense of collective pride that APS staff share in the work they do and the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues, and this is true across roles and schools. For example, in the Fall 2021 administration of school culture and climate surveys, 78% of staff reported that they feel significantly respected by their colleagues:

Staff: How Much Respect do Colleagues in your School Show You?



When asked in focus groups about what makes Arlington a wonderful place to work, educators shared appreciation for their colleagues and leaders across the system:

Educators Discuss Staff Culture

Arlington seems to hire some wonderful people. Hope that continues as the years go on. Teachers who are mentors present themselves and skills very professionally.

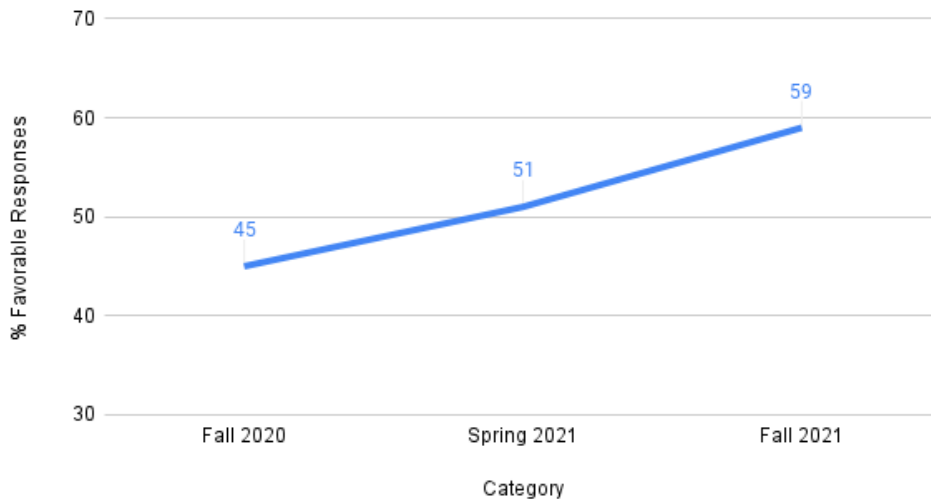
There is a strong community of support between administrator and teachers. Kids feel that connectedness.

[There is] a lot of faith in the teachers, trust that teachers are making decisions that are best for the students.

There is a strong relationship between the union and administration, working together for the best results for teachers and the students, not adversarial.

Staff also reported significant improvements to staff well-being overall from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021, and report feeling less frustrated, stressed, and worried while at work than in Fall of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic occupied most of staff’s attention and planning:

Staff Well-Being, 2020-2021



As noted by several stakeholders during focus groups, the Arlington Public Schools enjoys a strong relationship with bargaining units and it is important that this relationship be maintained in future years; a tradition of open dialogue and communication, including structures for the administration to hear and address the concerns of staff prior to escalation, have undoubtedly contributed to the positive environment of mutual respect expressed by so many APS educators in focus groups and on surveys.

The APS have also focused on expanding and developing leadership roles to support educators; for example, in the past several years, the district has invested in expansion of the district’s coaching model, with the goal of having full-time literacy and math coaches at every elementary school. This goal will be achieved in FY23. In FY22, the district added enough assistant principals for every school to have at least one full time assistant principal. These investments in leadership provide continuity and consistency of services for families and instructional expertise and support for job-embedded professional development.

Families and students have also shared how excellent APS teachers are when it comes to meeting the needs of their students. Across focus groups, students and families shared how APS teachers and service providers create a loving environment in which students can feel a sense of belonging:

Families and Students Discuss Staff Excellence

Arlington has excellent service providers who are good at communicating. OT, Speech and Language, Social workers - People have been excellent. I'm impressed with quality of hiring.
~APS Family Member

If we ever fell down, they [APS Teachers] pick us back up.
~APS Student

APS teachers treat you based on how they see you as a person, not so much as a learner.
~APS Student

I have one teacher who mandated a 15 minutes conversation at the beginning of the year like, it was part of your grade has to show up to that. And I think that really helps with getting to know your teacher.
~APS Student

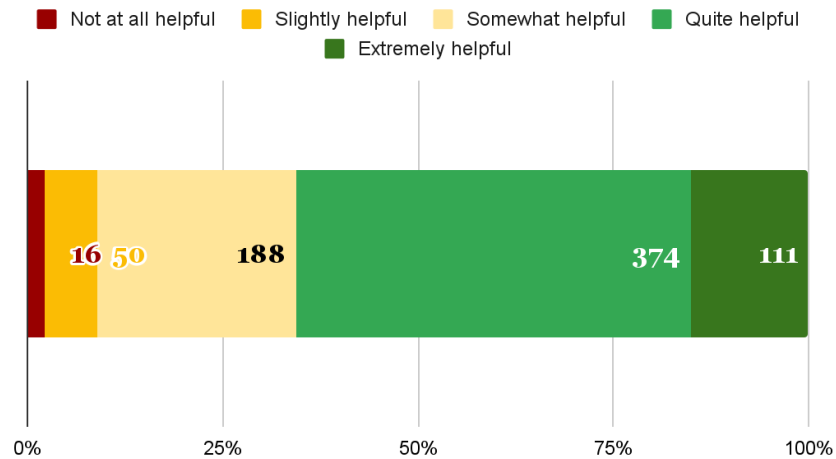
When it came to themes of “connection” with teachers, students and families had positive things to say about their teachers, acknowledging the effort APS teachers put into getting to know students and ensuring that all students have what they need.

Opportunities for Future Focus: Expanding School-Based Teacher Leadership and Professional Learning Design, Prioritizing Leadership Development

Collegiality and mutual respect is a necessary precondition for challenging conversations about equity and access, which APS teachers are eager to continue as we emerge from the pandemic. It was wonderful to hear from educators both how well they connect with their colleagues and how hopeful they are that the next generation of APS teachers will reflect the diversity of the students our staff serve every day. In this section I will discuss how, in order to recruit and retain a diverse staff, the APS can expand teacher leadership and professional development opportunities and prioritize the diversification and development of APS leadership.

As noted above, APS teachers shared in focus groups how much they value the expertise and partnership of their colleagues. This was evident in surveys as well, where 66% of APS staff reported that their colleagues' ideas were “quite or extremely” helpful for improving their work, with only 2% reporting that their colleagues' ideas were “not at all helpful.”

Staff: How Helpful are your Colleagues' Ideas for Improving your Work?



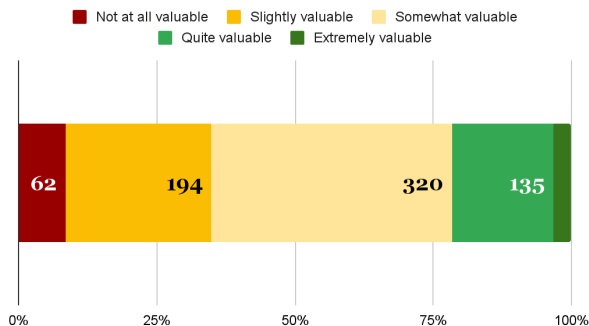
In focus groups, teachers shared what APS should “start” doing as part of its ongoing commitment to improving professional learning, including:

- Building a common understanding of “what we should be doing” when it comes to equity efforts in classrooms and the schools;
- More focus on restorative justice practices and reduction of punitive discipline;
- Required professional learning in equity and social justice for all district staff, across roles and departments; and
- More opportunities for teachers and families to learn and collaborate together on committees and as part of teacher professional learning.

While staff value the expertise of their colleagues, staff questioned the extent to which professional development was “valuable” or “relevant” to improving their practice:

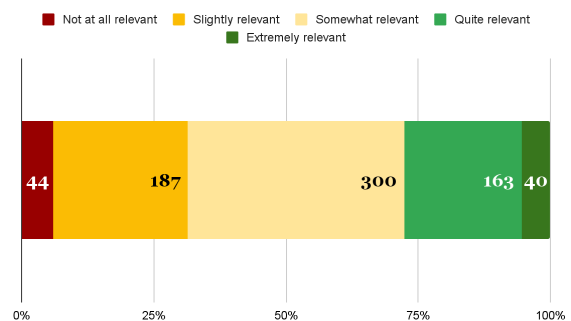
Valuable Professional Learning: **22% Quite or Extremely Valuable**

Staff: How Valuable are the Available Professional Development Opportunities?



Relevant Professional Learning: **28% Quite or Extremely Relevant**

Staff: How Relevant have your Professional Development Opportunities been to your Work?



Families shared their experiences relative to Staff Excellence and Professional Development, as well, indicating that though Arlington has excellent teachers, instructional consistency can vary across schools, departments, or teachers, indicating a need for more opportunities for focused teacher collaboration and alignment of expectations and practices:

Families Discuss Staff Development and Instruction

Across the board there needs to be more consistent training and support. Staff, principals, everyone needs to be really engaged. It should be something you expect that they do. And that they commit to.

Homework, inclusion practices, hiring practices are all inconsistent. In my experience as a member of the school councils, assisting school leaders in a hiring process that is more robust and consistent is necessary.

The range of instructional quality is huge, especially consistency of grading and homework practices. Stop putting the responsibility on the individual student and the individual family. This exacerbates the inequity that exists.

There is a disparity among some of the staff and the way that they handle discipline. This relates to children with special needs. We continue to throw the resources at the child with special needs without addressing the students around them. It's not always the kid with special needs who needs the social worker.

A focus on developing the systems and structures for consistent collaboration between leadership, teachers, and families has the potential to build upon recent investments in coaching, consistent leadership across schools, and job-embedded professional development. These efforts may include:

- Establishment of Instructional Leadership Teams at all schools, focused on supporting high-quality professional development that will meet the unique learning needs of students at each APS school;
- Continued focus on school improvement planning and how Instructional Leadership Teams work with School Councils and other school-based teams to articulate priorities and benchmarks for each APS school, aligned to district goals;
- Establishment of school-based teacher leadership roles, including opportunities for teachers to share in the design and implementation of school-based professional learning; and
- Expansion of opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership development professional learning, including partnerships with local universities for graduate

coursework in school leadership and internal opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership professional development.

Some actions have already taken place in the 2021-22 school year to support leadership development and building a shared understanding of instruction within and across APS Schools; for example:

- All administrators gathered for a 2-day Leadership Institute in August, where leaders analyzed multiple data sources and worked in school-based teams to develop preliminary “problems of practice” at each school;
- School leaders worked with School Councils and existing school leadership teams to develop School Improvement Plans and present them publicly to the School Committee and community;
- All administrators have gathered throughout the district to engage in professional development and Instructional Rounds during the school year; the schedule, objectives, and focus areas for these experiences can be found in the [2021-22 Leader Learning Plan](#). Teachers and coaches have participated in some of these sessions as content-area experts and guest facilitators.
- All principals have engaged in school visits, including walkthroughs, with the Superintendent, followed by opportunities to debrief school outcomes and progress towards goals.

In future years, these efforts may expand to include coaches, teachers, and even students, providing structured opportunities for collaboration to place across levels and roles.

Resources, Infrastructure, and Educational Environment: Systems and Investments to Support Sustained Excellence

The strengths of APS when it comes to resources and infrastructure were evident from my initial interview; the Arlington community has invested significantly in education over the past several years, and evidence of this investment is currently being built in the center of town. As the New Arlington High School prepares for the opening of Phase 1 and the beginning of work on Phase 2, the APS enters an exciting time for the future of the district. The strong leadership of the former administration, AHS administration, and community as a whole is evident in the innovative craftsmanship, design, and programming of the New Arlington High School and other buildings and programs in the district portfolio, as well as in the Town’s sustained and strategic investment in the public schools.

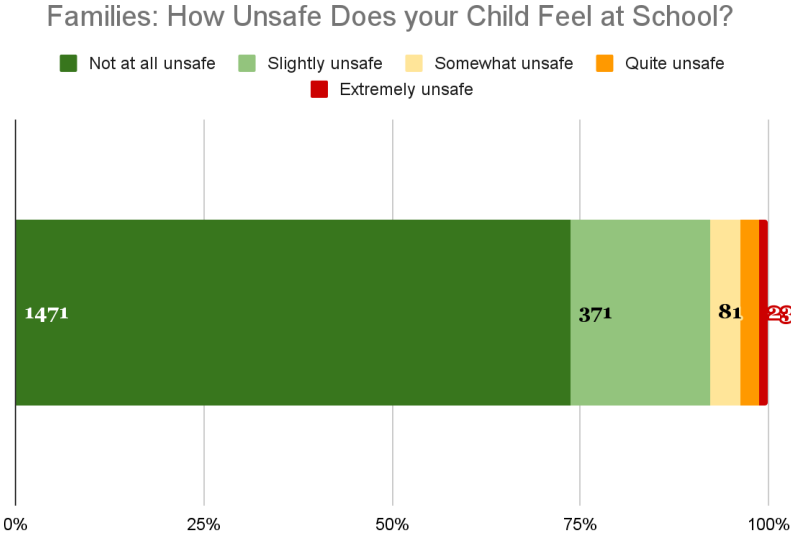
Strengths to Build Upon: Strategic Investment in Resources and Infrastructure to Support Student Learning

Among the core strengths of the district is its focus on improving facilities over the past decade to meet the demands of significant enrollment growth. In the eight years preceding the pandemic, Arlington experienced a 24.5% increase in enrollment: 4,858 in 2012,

compared to 6,047 in 2020, as articulated in the Focus Group Report for the 2021 Superintendent Search. During this period of significant enrollment, the district and community made significant investments in infrastructure, including fully town-funded projects to upgrade and expand the Hardy, Thompson, Gibbs, and Stratton schools and extended engagement with the MSBA and community to fund the High School Building Project.

The design and subsequent opening of the Gibbs 6th Grade School in 2018 was a particularly important initiative that has shaped the experience of students in Arlington as they transition from elementary to middle and high school; the design of this school involved moving all Arlington students through the same three schools for their secondary experience and creating a special 6th grade experience for all APS students at the newly-renovated Gibbs. Students at Gibbs shared in focus groups how much they enjoy having a 6th grade school “all to themselves,” and their appreciation for the school’s focus on their social and emotional development and relationship-building as Arlington students, “finally all together in one building,” as one 6th grade student fondly characterized his experience meeting new classmates at the Gibbs.

It is evident from conversations and survey feedback from families and students that APS provides schools in which students feel safe and as though they can access the resources they need to thrive; 92% of families reported in Fall 2021 surveys that their child feels generally safe while at school.



When asked what they appreciate most about the Arlington Public Schools, families and students named the following services as important to for APS to both continue and build upon:

- Well-stocked and professionally-staffed school libraries;
- Access to working and reliably learning technologies;

- Access to Fine and Performing Arts programming;
- Access to After School programming;
- Diverse coursework opportunities, particularly at Arlington High School; and
- Robust extracurricular opportunities at the middle and high school levels.

Among other wonderful things about the APS that families shared, these are resources that families, students, and staff appreciate and hope to see expand in the years ahead, which will require significant planning and prioritization of resources by the administration, in partnership with the School Committee and larger community, in order to accomplish.

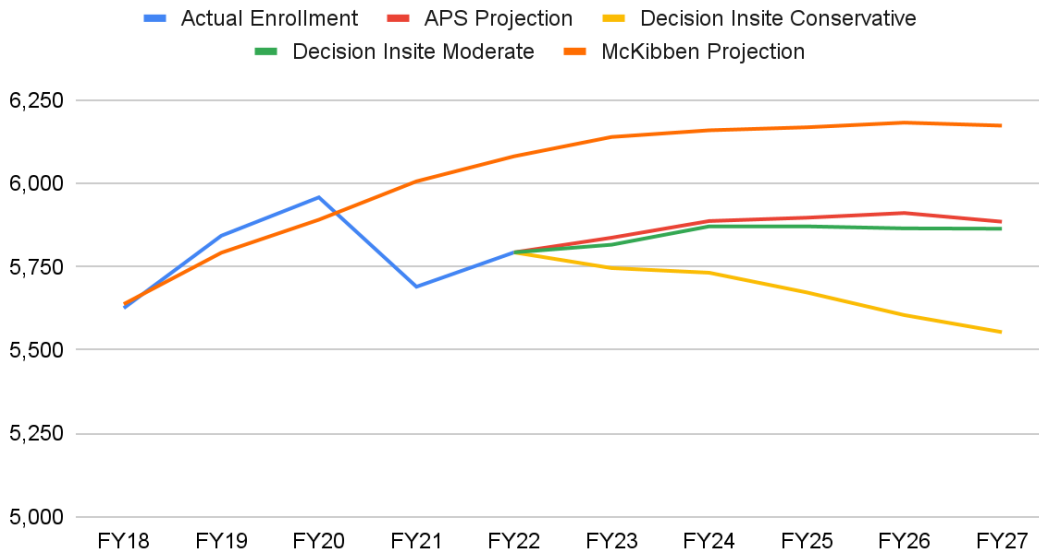
Opportunities for Future Focus: Continuation of Facilities Improvements, and Balancing Enrollments

The district is well-positioned to meet the infrastructural demands of the decade ahead, especially given the previous decade's investment in facilities and infrastructure. As the Town approaches FY24, there will be a need for another operating override, requiring continued collaboration between town and school departments and officials and for APS to articulate and clearly communicate with the larger community clear priorities for post-pandemic education that build upon the existing operational strengths of the district.

In order to continue the progress made towards facilities improvements, future efforts to improve infrastructure will need to focus on the Ottoson Middle School, which celebrated its 100th anniversary this school year. Built in 1921 as Junior High West, Ottoson Middle School is the oldest building in the Arlington Public Schools' portfolio, and will require renovation or rebuilding in the near future. As we look forward to the full completion of the Arlington High School Building Project in 2025, the district will either need to submit a Statement of Interest to the MSBA for either their Accelerated Repair or Core Program, and/or work with the town to commit funds to the renovation of Ottoson. The schools are in the process of beginning this work now, in addition to collaborating with the Town to accelerate improvements to several playgrounds.

Significant attention has been paid in recent years to enrollment forecasts for the Arlington Public Schools. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted expected enrollment, real estate, and even birth trends, creating new budgetary and planning considerations for the district in future years. An unexpected drop in APS enrollments due to the COVID-19 pandemic was mirrored in communities across the Commonwealth and the country; while enrollments are expected to rebound to some extent, it remains unclear how much they will rebound and how individual school communities will be impacted.

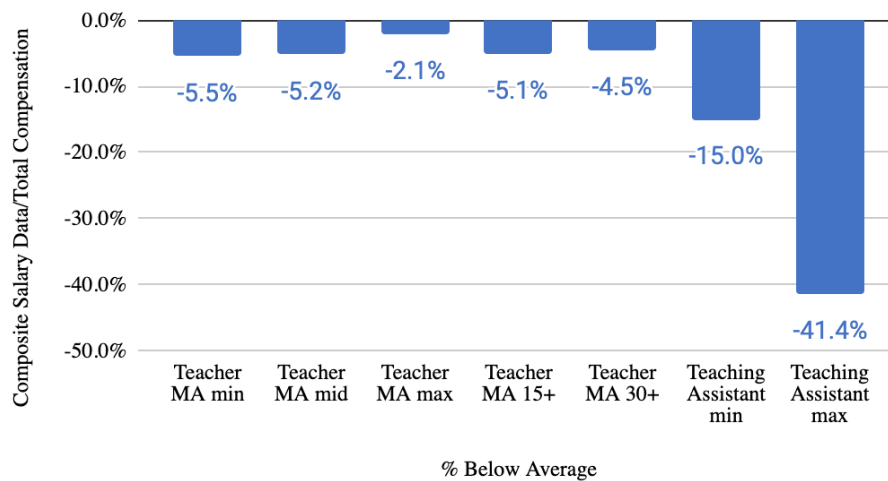
APS Actual and Projected Enrollment Comparisons



Current projections - developed both internally and by external vendors - indicate that post-pandemic APS enrollments may not rebound to levels previously projected by experts; however, it is possible that enrollments could rebound more than expected due to cultural and economic factors that may be difficult to predict. Over the next several years, it will be important for the district to continue monitoring enrollment trends, both at the district and school levels, and to ensure that the district has the resources required to meet the post-pandemic needs of an increasingly diverse student population. It will also be important for the district to ensure that enrollments are balanced across the schools to ensure equity of access to programming. Established buffer zones between schools may need to be adjusted or revisited depending upon enrollment trends over the next several years.

Another area of opportunity exists in ensuring that APS has the resources necessary to offer competitive salaries to staff. A 2020 Town of Arlington salary study indicated that Arlington Public Schools staff are paid below the average rate of surrounding towns with a similar taxbase; this is particularly true for APS paraprofessionals, some of whom are paid over 40% below the average, and is also true for teachers at all salary levels.

APS Teacher and Paraprofessional Pay Relative to Average



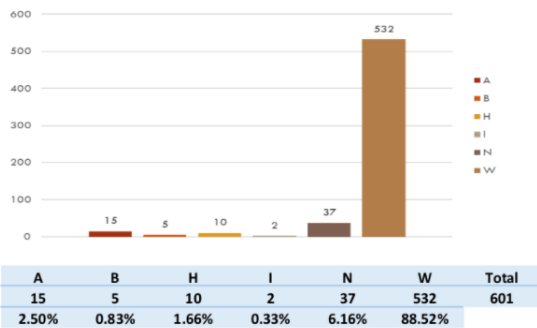
Considering the important work that our teachers, teaching assistants, and other support personnel provide for our students on a daily basis and the district’s focus on hiring a diverse workforce, future financial planning efforts may need to focus on boosting competitive pay for members of the staff whose pay falls short of the average of comparable communities.

Competitive pay is particularly important for diversification efforts, which many stakeholders expressed interest in prioritizing in the coming years. The APS student population is increasingly diverse; in Fall 2021, 69.6% of APS students identified as white, compared to 74.5% in 2015 and 78.5% in 2010:

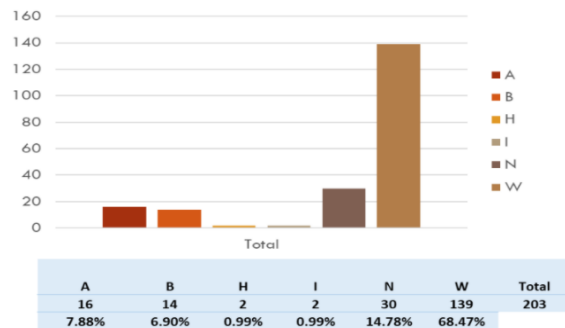
Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2021-22)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	3.4	9.3
Asian	12.9	7.2
Hispanic	6.5	23.1
Native American	0.0	0.2
White	69.6	55.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	7.6	4.3

Despite these shifts in the student population, APS staff are predominantly white and female: Fall 2021 professional staff identified as White at a rate of 88.52%, with 6.16% not reporting their race or ethnicity. Paraprofessional staff present an opportunity for pipeline support to increase the diversity of professional staff; in Fall 2021, 6.9% of paraprofessional staff identified as Black, 7.88% as Asian, and nearly 2% as either Hispanic or Indigenous.

APS Teaching and Professional Staff: Demographic Breakdown



APS Paraprofessional Staff: Demographic Breakdown



Staff members and families also talked about the need for an increased focus not only on recruitment of staff of color, but on retention of those staff once they join the Arlington Public Schools:

Stakeholders Discuss Diversification of Staffing

I appreciate the commitment the district has made to equity work, but it would be helpful if the district worked harder on maintaining staff of color in particular in the district. There is a high turnover rate. What can be put in place to support staff of color?
~APS Staff

I have not seen diversity among administrative staff. APS needs more representation in leadership.
~APS Family

APS needs more teachers and staff of color. How can APS prioritize hiring from underrepresented groups?
~APS Family

These data suggest that prioritizing efforts to develop staffing pipelines and incentives for teachers and professionals of color to join the Arlington Public Schools will be widely supported by all stakeholders in the district and will benefit students and staff by bringing diverse perspectives and expertise to APS classrooms and collaborations.

Overall, as in other areas, APS is operating from a position of strength when it comes to prioritizing the appropriate resources and infrastructure to support student learning. In upcoming years, continuing improvements to facilities, enabling competitive pay for staff,

monitoring and budgeting for enrollment trends, and enabling staff diversification will build upon the achievements of the past decade.

Operations, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement: Developing and Sustaining Partnerships with Families and Community

I was drawn to serving the Arlington community in the capacity of Superintendent in large part because of the assertion in the Superintendent Search Focus Group Report that Arlington is a town with a “highly engaged population” and that “respectful support of the town has been earned as the result of long-term, consistent and transparent government and the success of students.” This characterization of the Arlington community has been reinforced throughout my transition, as community members have expressed a desire to be deeply involved as participants in the schools’ efforts to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

Strengths to Build Upon: Established Collaborations with Town Officials and Widespread Interest in Two-Way Partnership with Families

The Town of Arlington’s support for education has been evident in the passage of several operating overrides, the most recent of which was for \$5.5M. This override supported both the building of the New High School and improvements to programming system wide, and passed with a significant majority vote of 68%. Families and staff in focus groups shared appreciation for the long-standing collaborative relationship between the Town and schools and an interest in continuing to invest resources for the Arlington Public Schools.

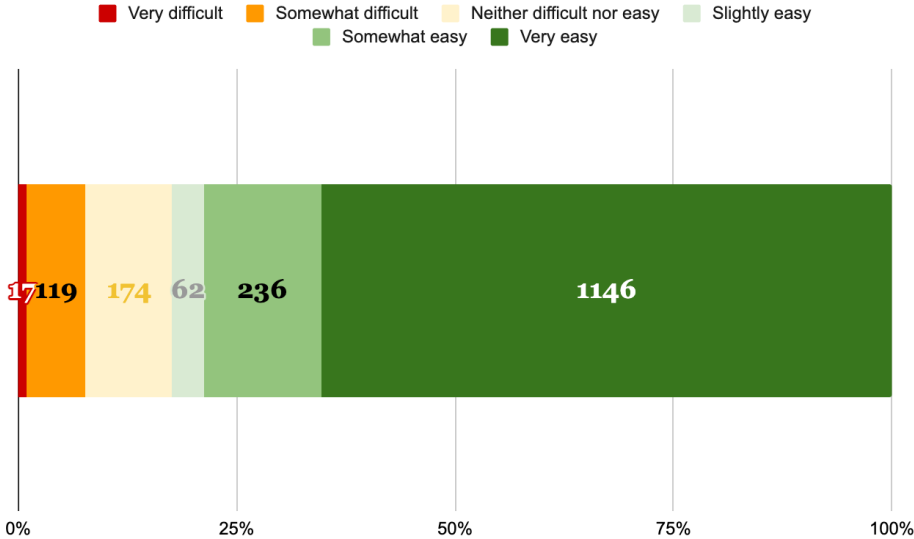
The collaborative relationship between Town and schools is also characterized by an interest from both Town administration and officials and APS families and staff in long-range, purposeful, and proactive strategic planning. The Town of Arlington has done this in partnership with Envision Arlington to develop a Master Plan that has guided municipal planning since 2015, including commitments to sustainability that are mirrored in building projects. The Arlington School Committee engaged with the administration in 2019 to develop a 5-Year Budget Plan that has guided much of the budgetary decision-making of the past several years and has provided a valuable roadmap for programmatic and resource planning, even throughout the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The project team for the New Arlington High School also engaged in an inclusive community strategic visioning process that resulted in an excellent and innovative Educational Plan for the new building. Such examples of sustained strategic work are evidence of a longstanding Town culture of professionalism and mutual respect.

Strong relationships with the community extend beyond Town collaborations and into relationships with Town Departments and other community organizations. The Arlington

Education Foundation has provided a steady stream of resources to support innovation, strategic district planning, and expansion of promising initiatives for several decades. Early in my tenure, the Arlington Education Foundation and Envision Arlington worked with my administration to begin planning for the exciting inclusive district strategic planning work ahead in Phase 4.

Families have also reported strong communications with their children’s teachers and other school staff, and an appreciation for teachers, principals, and service providers who have made significant efforts to be responsive to families’ needs and inquiries, with 82% of families reporting that it is easy for them to get into contact with their children’s teachers or other staff members:

Families: When you Need to, How Easy is it to Get in Contact with School Staff?



I have witnessed the willingness of Arlington families and community members to partner with the schools first-hand in my first six months of service; in the Summer of 2021, efforts to reopen schools fully and safely to all students for in-person learning necessitated that we engage families and staff in conversations about the COVID-19 mitigation measures and learning recovery plans they expected and desired from the Arlington schools. An invitation to participate in collaborative planning for the start of the 2021-22 school year resulted in a committee of over 75 teachers, administrators, and families who helped to develop the APS Pandemic Recovery Plan. Furthermore, partnerships with the Town Health and Human Services Department have enabled Arlington to lead the state in pediatric vaccinations in 2021. All of these experiences serve as evidence that Arlington is a community dedicated to working together to do what is best for children, families, educators, and the broader community.

Opportunities for Future Focus: Engaging with Families, Students, and the Community as Partners and Participants

Throughout my entry process, I enjoyed meeting families, students, and staff who are eager to partner with my administration to develop a vision for the future of Arlington's schools. This participatory spirit was always accompanied by a desire to understand the "why" behind how decisions are made, be provided an opportunity to be heard during the decision-making process, and have access to information that leads to important decisions. This interest in transparency and trust was a common theme in conversations with all stakeholders. In this section, I will discuss ways APS can build upon the collaborative spirit of the Arlington community in order to address challenges related to communication, access to information, and developing true partnerships with students, families, and the community.

Communication has always been critical to the successful development of relationships between schools and families, and the importance of this has been amplified for the past two years as the COVID-19 pandemic has required swift adjustments and the communication of complicated programs and protocols. Families in Arlington expressed a desire for timely, relevant, and succinct communications during my entry process, emphasizing the importance of streamlined and consistent communications from both building and district leadership:

Families Discuss District and School Communications

Communication in general can be improved. The district should use different forms, not just emails, and some of them that are not based on technology or facebook.

Be transparent, up front, give communication when you can, and acknowledge when you can't.

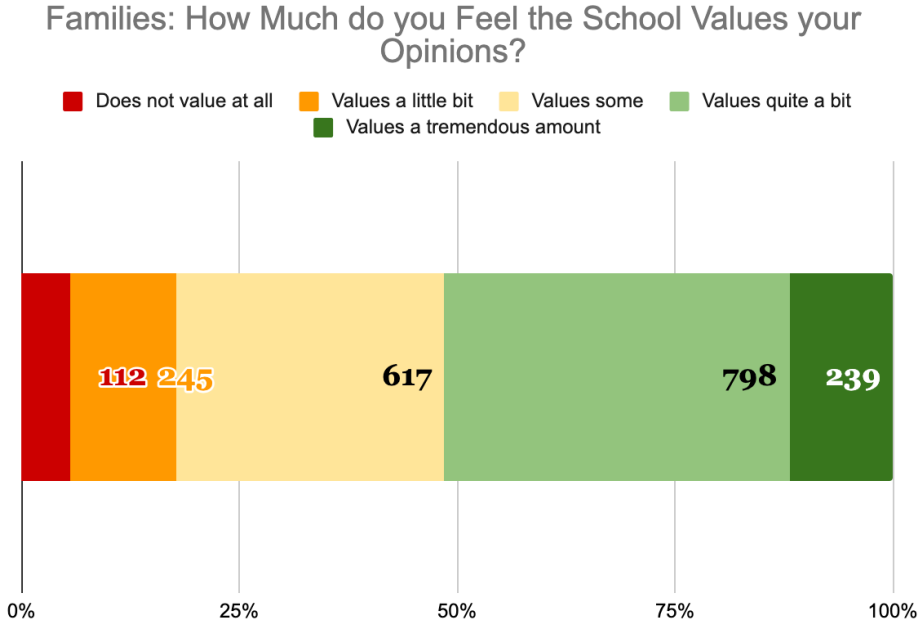
Think about consistency across schools and experiences across the district. Different levels of communication. Ways sensitive or high-profile topics are communicated.

I work so I'm never at the school, so I'm trying to piece everything together. It would be nice to have a uniform system of communication, no matter what teacher or grade level they all follow it and you don't have to go seeking information.

Across focus groups, families shared varying feelings about home-to-school communications, indicating an opportunity for continued focus on building consistency across communications practices and modalities at the district, school, and classroom levels. They articulated a desire for fewer lengthy information-packed emails and newsletters,

more opportunities to access and meet with their children’s teachers, and easy access to relevant and need-to-know information in multiple formats and locations, accessible in multiple languages.

Families’ feedback was mixed when it came to feeling as though their opinions and partnership are valued by school and district administration; on culture and climate surveys, only 52% of families felt as though their opinions were valued by the schools. In focus groups, some families shared that partnership happens in “pockets,” with collaborative groups coming together occasionally, but not always with consistent structures or mechanisms for feedback across schools. Families also shared that it is not always clear or communicated what actions are taken based on family feedback. Families suggested that inconsistencies in the level of activity of School Councils, PTOs, and Diversity and Inclusion (DIG) Groups may provide opportunities for further partnership.



My administration has already taken preliminary steps in some of these areas in response to family feedback, including using multiple modes of communication and providing more access to communications in multiple languages; however, there are many opportunities for continued improvement in this area, especially when it comes to developing true two-way partnerships with families in APS. Future efforts may focus on areas such as:

- Upgrades to communications systems, including messaging systems and district and school websites;
- Continuous feedback on and revision of approaches to providing families with timely, consistent, and relevant information;

- Building systems and structures for all families to engage in school improvement planning and feel like welcome members of their school communities;
- Consistent communications strategies across buildings and departments;
- Improvement of availability of information and accessibility of family events, regardless of language, culture, ability, or identity; and
- Ability for all families to participate as partners with the schools, regardless of language, culture, ability, or identity.

Families and community partners with whom I have met throughout my transition have also expressed interest in participating in planning and initiatives in Arlington’s schools. Eager to volunteer their time and expertise, Arlington’s community organizations and families bring a wealth of knowledge from all corners of the globe and all industries, and it is imperative that the schools recognize these perspectives as assets and opportunities for partnership.

This report marks the completion of my formal “transition” into the role of Superintendent for the Arlington Public Schools, though I will continue to learn about the Arlington community throughout my time in this important role. In the next phase of leadership, I am looking forward to developing a vision and action steps that will carry Arlington, its youth, and its families into a future that is bright with possibility and potential.

