

Superintendent Bodie, Assistant Superintendent Chesson
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 Hannah, Stratton Elementary School, Stephanie Zerchykov, Brackett Elementary School, and Kristin DeFrancisco, Hardy Elementary School.

We wanted to begin tonight by thanking you and giving you an update on how we have used the resources that we prioritized in our budget requests last year.

Last year we asked for support to add full time aids to our Kindergarten classrooms. We were able to do that in some classrooms with high numbers and this has certainly made a difference in these classrooms. We are happy to say that the addition of learning specialists has allowed us to mitigate some of the larger caseloads and to begin to think about how we implement co-teaching strategies to help all students. Increased coaching staff has helped to give teachers the support they need as they implement new curriculum in the areas of math, reading and writing. Foss science kits are in classrooms and teachers are working to learn about and implement this new hands on curriculum.

Message to the Community:

This year, we come before you to prioritize what we feel will help our elementary schools meet all of the important goals that we have established as a district. You will hear about some of these goals in our discussion tonight. It is important in this discussion to take a look at what we as principals are experiencing on a daily basis.

As the Arlington Public School's student body increases, so does the complex profile of students we are receiving, increasing the responsibility and time demands on the building principal. Our instructional leadership responsibilities and personal leadership styles are compromised due to these facts. It has become increasingly challenging to do our jobs at the level to which we personally hold ourselves and at which the District and School Committee expect of us.

Research shows that 25.1 percent of children have been diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Eight to 15 percent of students have a learning disability. Nine percent have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and 11.2 percent suffer from depression.

Several of our elementary schools have become level 2 schools over the course of the past few years. This is attributed to the constant demands and challenges of the elementary school program, while teachers, specialists, and administrators, work to support Tier I students in the

inclusive, general education classroom, along with our High Needs, Tier II and III, students, who require specialized, direct, and systematic instruction.

For clarification, a high needs student belongs to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and former ELL students, or economically disadvantaged students. For a school to be considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps, the cumulative PPI for both the all students group and high needs students must be 75 or higher. In short, in order to stay committed to the high standards to which the community and our students have become accustomed, and to support the growing high needs students due to increased enrollment growth

The Elementary Principal group has identified three contributing factors that are affecting (impeding) our ability to lead our educational communities effectively:

1. Principals have reached or gone beyond capacity
2. Daily scheduling constraints have limited administrative liberty to design general curriculum programs within the classroom, along with interventions, both at the general education and special education level
3. Social Workers are doing more than their scope of work as they strive to support the social/emotional well-being of all students within our schools and those who require specialized attention

With this said, our four asks for the FY17 school year are:

- Assistant Principals at the elementary level
- Increased FTEs for specialist staff
- An increase in Board Certified Behavioral Specialists (BCBAs)
- Continued financial support for social emotional programming, specifically Responsive Classroom and Open Circle training

The success of high needs students in an elementary school depends on many factors. Some of these factors are:

- Preventing disruptions to the classroom
- Providing high quality PD for teachers
- Ensuring high quality curriculum experiences
- **Building the capacity of teachers to implement social emotional programming**
- Supporting intervention programs in math and reading
- **Creating a schedule that allows for services to be delivered in an efficient way**
- Having enough staff to support a schedule that matches our pedagogical vision
- **Creating a climate where all students feel confident and as a result can access curriculum**
- **Promoting an environment with growth mindset.**

- Facilitating data meetings where teachers understand how to use data to inform instruction
- **Providing feedback during evaluation follow up conversations with teachers that is meaningful and that contains through lines from evaluation to evaluation.**
- **Working to promote a co-teaching environment where special educators are able to do important work with all students in classrooms.**
- Supporting the coaching staff in curriculum areas
- Developing an SST protocol where teachers understand the response to intervention model and are able to bring data to the table to inform both academic and behavioral plans and strategies for children.
- Principal presence at Special Education team meetings so that signatures on IEP's represent a true consent to the plan in place for the high needs students.
- Staff who are able to consistently meet with children that have been identified on IEP's as well as visit classrooms to address social emotional needs. Social workers are often leaned on for problem solving outside of their social work responsibilities.

All of the items listed above require involvement of the principal at a high level. In order to bring about significant improvement in schools/district, especially for **high needs populations**, there must be a clear vision for leadership.

We are concerned that because the principal is involved in making **all** of these facets run smoothly, with minimal administrative support at the building level, and with **schedule restraints and growing school populations**, this is becoming increasingly more difficult.

Assistant Principals with a clear, defined role at the elementary level would support the work necessary to ensure success for high needs students. This ask would free the principal to be more involved with educational leadership initiatives. It would also allow social workers to be able to fulfill their roles as intended.

The elementary school schedule is a key component to making sure that our district goals and curriculum initiatives are possible to execute. Without schedules that support common planning time, co-teaching methods, coaching programs, intervention plans and teacher collaboration through learning walk-throughs, we will not be able to meet our goals effectively. The schedule creates a struggle for the following reasons:

- Art is on a different time table
- Specialists are shared between two and often times among three different school buildings. Because of this, individual school schedules cannot be built until the specialist schedule has been decided on the district level. This impacts the ability to give common planning time, stagger subject areas to accommodate Special Education, and ELL services, schedule for title one intervention, provide RTI reading services.

- Instrumental Music is difficult to schedule during the school day because the limited amount of staff is spread among 7 elementary schools and the middle school. Students are sometimes missing common core subjects to participate.
- Because we have all of these parameters to consider before being able to schedule core subjects, it is often impossible to create a schedule where teachers have common planning time.
- Consideration of these parameters also impacts how well we are able to deliver special education services and support co-teaching practices.

This is why we ask for more specialist positions that are community based and can facilitate both the growing number of students in all schools and to help us create a schedule that matches our educational philosophy.

BCBAs - Behavior Analysis is the scientific study of principles of learning and behavior. Two primary areas of study include the experimental analysis of behavior and applied behavior analysis. The experimental analysis of behavior is the basic science of the discipline and has, over many decades, accumulated a substantial and well-respected body of research literature on how behavior is learned and changes over time. The experimental analysis of behavior is the scientific foundation of applied behavior analysis (ABA). ABA is a systematic approach for influencing socially important behavior through the identification of reliably related environmental variables and the production of behavior change techniques that make use of those findings. Practitioners of behavior analysis provide services consistent with the dimensions of ABA. Common services may include, but are not limited to, conducting behavioral assessments, analyzing data, writing and revising behavior-analytic treatment plans, training others to implement components of treatment plans, and overseeing the implementation of treatment plans. Behavior analysts are qualified to provide services to clients with a variety of needs, including improvements in organizational functioning (e.g., staff performance, management and pay structure interventions), skill deficits (e.g., communication, adaptive behavior), and problem behavior (e.g., aggression, self-injurious behavior), among others. In our setting, BCBAs also help to build the capacity of all teachers who work with our students. Learning how to implement a behavioral plan for a student is essential to that student's success.

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At this time, the district has three BCBAs for ALL Arlington Public Schools; not nearly a big enough team to meet the needs of our growing population of students. Our BCBAs are straight out, and at no fault of their own, lack the bandwidth, collaboration, detail, and follow through, to support the teams of teachers and staff effectively. As a result, social workers, in collaboration with the BCBAs, have taken on responsibilities outside of their scope of work, which, in turn, compromises their work.

This is why we ask for additional BCBAs to expand the important work of helping students to be able to access their classrooms and build the capacity of teachers to maintain this work.

Finally, one of the ways that the district has begun to help elementary schools welcome all students and establish communities where students are able to thrive socially and emotionally is the Responsive Classroom approach.

This approach is a way of teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. Developed by classroom teachers, the approach consists of practical strategies for helping students build academic and social-emotional competencies day in and day out.

Seven principles guide this approach:

1. The social and emotional curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn.
3. Great cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. To be successful academically and socially, children need to learn a set of social and emotional skills: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
5. Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children we teach.
7. How we, the adults at school, work together is as important as our individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

Over the past 3 summers, the SUCCESS Grant has funded a 4 day training for 30 staff members each summer, on Responsive Classroom, it's principles and best practices. This work has supported the need for a consistent approach to addressing student expectations. Through the use of common language, school wide expectations, and community building activities, students are recognizing their voice and seeing their role as members of the greater school community. This contributes to positive social and emotional growth of both staff and students.

Schools that have been using this approach have noticed a significant change in office referrals and a consistency around how teachers are working to make sure expectations are clear and consequences for students are logical. It is important that we are able to continue this work where it has started and begin this work in other schools.

With the SUCCESS grant ending, we are asking for resources to sustain Responsive Classroom and offer trainings for additional staff members throughout the district.

This concludes our asks for budget considerations. We appreciate your time and are more than happy to answer any questions about what we have presented this evening.