

11/20/2014

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.

BCBA's and BSP's: This year we are benefitting from working with more BCBA's (Board Certified Behavior Analysts) in the district and BSP's (Behavior Support Personnel) as well. When a student is struggling socially and emotionally, we are able to tap into these two resources to help. They consult as we develop plans like those describe to us by Jessica Minahan, a BCBA that is working with the district to build our knowledge of behavior, through her professional development workshops and her book The Behavior Code. Because of the increased BCBA support, specific BCBA's are now designated for work at specific schools. While they each have two or three schools, there is still a point person to connect with when a teacher is struggling with a student that cannot access the curriculum due to social/emotional needs. In some cases, BCBA's, along with the special education department, may be able to support a school by assigning a BSP to a building with a specific intervention plan in mind. These short-term plans have been helpful in supporting a student so that he or she can remain in the home school in the least restrictive environment.

Library TA's: We are happy to be able to have retained our library TA's and are thankful we were able to acknowledge their importance and work with our students with a salary increase.

2 Special Ed Liaisons: Having two highly qualified special education liaisons in our buildings for a second year continues to help not only service increasing special education caseloads, but also helps us implement models of co-teaching to support general education RTI instruction. Because special educators are now able to take on three grades each, they are able to focus on three grade levels of curriculum as opposed to 6. We have seen the amount of collaboration with classroom teachers increase because of the reduced grade level load. Liaisons are able to build closer relationships with students that allow them to be more effective with instruction. These liaisons have been able to become part of differentiated group instruction that is based on data to support sub-groups composed of both special education and regular education students. Having this kind of expertise in

our buildings has definitely shown to be effective as we create learning environments based on data and begin to implement co-teaching strategies that benefit all of our students.

**Maintaining small class sizes:** We feel this will always be a priority for us because smaller class sizes increase our ability as educators to do the kind of teaching and students to do the kind learning that are district goals support.

As we move into thinking about next year, we have kept our district goals in mind and are requesting support based on fulfilling these goals. The district's first goal reads that the Arlington Public Schools will ensure that every graduate is prepared to complete a post-secondary degree program, pursue a career and be an active citizen in an ever-changing world by offering a rigorous, comprehensive, standards-based driven K-12 system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that integrates social, emotional and wellness support. In order to do this we go on to state that students will receive increased support for social-emotional needs in recognition of the interconnection between the social-emotional needs of students and the academic challenges of the curriculum.

- In order to do this, we need the support of a **full time social worker in each elementary school**. Social workers work in each building on a daily basis with students who need support to access the curriculum due to many reasons. Some include anxiety while others include the need for social scaffolding so that they can become contributing members to their classroom communities. We speak often about building the capacity of our classroom teachers around social emotional support for students and the way we do this each day is with our social workers. They participate in administering plans that help all students access the curriculum and remain in the least restrictive environments for learning, their classrooms. These interventions occur beyond individual sessions and lunch group sessions. This support also occurs on the playground, in the cafeteria and in classrooms so that students have in the moment support and scaffolding to practice needed skills. Having a full time social worker in each building has been supported by a grant that will expire at the end of this school year. **This is why we are asking for the town to maintain the full time social worker position in each elementary school.**
- Still in goal one, we have set forth an initiative to emphasize inquiry based learning in order to promote student engagement and a deeper understanding of the curriculum. We are doing just that this year in mathematics as we are using our math coaches to work with teachers to design and support inquiry based learning in math. We have begun this work in writing with a literacy lab approach to professional development. Teachers visit others who are models as they teach model writing lessons. They meet and reflect about these lessons. The observing teachers then go back to their classrooms to put this work into place. We would like to implement this model with reading as well and enhance it by providing additional

literacy coach support so that when teachers begin to implement these model lessons in their classrooms, they have a coach to work with to provide feedback and strengthen the teacher practice. We have seen the benefit of this coaching model in math over the past two years and look forward to enhancing our reading instruction in the same manner. This is why we ask for the support to have a **professional development time for teachers and a .5 literacy coach in each elementary school next year.**

- In order to leverage the time children spend in the intellectual and inquiry based environment described tonight, we have been spending time on enhancing our use of data to inform our instruction. Goal one initiative four and five talk about our commitment to narrow the achievement gap by providing subgroups additional support to obtain a PPI of 75 in the aggregate and in the high needs subgroups as well as a SGP of 51 or higher. Our goal two initiative 2 states that administrators and teachers will be provided professional development and planning time to be able to systematically and routinely use data to guide instructional decisions and meet students' learning needs. In addition, initiative 5 references the need for teachers to have support around differentiating for students. We are excited to be able to provide more consistent time this year to teachers for data meetings that are helping teachers to define these subgroups and plan interventions accordingly. What we do need to enhance this model is continued professional development around analyzing data and running these meetings in a way that reaches all subgroups. Further, we would like to modify, improve and refine our data collection around response to intervention. Our subgroups are not making the effective progress that we would like to see. We need to have a way to figure out what we are missing and monitor progress. This may include the purchase of a data collection system that would help us bring relevant data to our meetings. **This is why we ask for support with providing professional development for teachers and administrators around running effective data meetings and the purchase of a program that would provide multiple data measures to inform student progress and support our efforts for intervention.**
- As we work to enhance our instructional practices around math and ELA in our previous requests, we would also like to spend time on thinking about the curriculum that we currently have in the area of science. We would like to start the process around adopting a STEM science curriculum that speaks to next generation science and is aligned with common core state standards. This kind of curriculum would be more in sync with some of the engineering units and scratch junior units that we currently have at the elementary level as supplements. **This is why we ask for support in the purchase of a STEM curriculum.**

- As we all know, our Tools of the Mind curriculum in Kindergarten is helping teachers to provide an environment in which our youngest students gain confidence, self regulation skills, and their first exposure to discovery and inquiry based learning. It is this foundation that will prepare these children to continue being engaged in their learning and work to become college and career ready. A recent study of the program by New York University has just been published and results show that students in Tools classrooms, in comparison with students in control classrooms, showed gains in executive function as well as literacy and math achievement. Their achievement accelerated in first grade, meaning that they learned more efficiently and had a greater growth rate than peers from control classrooms, showing lasting effects. These gains were especially significant for at-risk children. As teachers across the district work with Tools coaches and visit mentor teachers it becomes ever apparent that in order to deliver this program throughout the entire school day, teachers and students would benefit from having a full time TA. **This is why we are asking for full time Kindergarten TA's next year.**
- Finally, we have found it increasingly hard to recruit, hire and retain qualified TA's to build the capacity of special education and general education instruction. As stated earlier, in order to create intellectually stimulating, experiential learning environments that reach all subgroups, teachers need support to run inquiry based, data based and differentiated classrooms. This requires a level of TA support that our TA salary base does not support. **This is why we are asking for an increase in TA salaries for next year.**

School committee members, we thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening and have shared our requests in order of priority. We are all happy to answer any questions you may have about these requests as well as how we are using our resources around last year's requests.