

Speech for School Committee December 17th

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.

Maintaining the full time social worker position at each elementary school has been something that has allowed each school principal to ensure that our students' social emotional wellness is supported. Social workers have been able to not only see students individually and in small groups, but also have been able to lead social thinking lessons in general education classrooms that help students learn ways to self regulate and access curriculum more effectively. In addition, social workers have been able to co-treat students with OT providers and even special educators. This holistic approach allows students to practice skills in authentic settings.

Last year, we highlighted the need for more relevant, STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) focused learning experiences for our students in the elementary grades. By supporting the purchase and implementation of new curriculum, you have helped us to bring FOSS (Full Option Science System) to elementary students in first, second, and third grade. New units of study are well underway and teachers have received professional development to aid in their instruction. As a result, students are engaged in hands-on, inquiry based science opportunities aligned to Next Generation Science Standards. Children are building parachute system to study air resistance, designing solutions to real life design problems, and developing a concrete understanding of engineering. We look forward to the next phase of implementation for our 4th and 5th graders next school year.

By granting our request to increase Teacher Assistant salaries this year, we feel that we are able to maintain the teacher assistants that we have worked hard to integrate into our learning communities. Our teaching assistants are being asked to learn about all that is required to support the school cultures that we have. They work with the greatest amount of students in the building. They help to support students in all areas of the building and during all subject areas. Often times, our building teacher assistants are

needed to be the most flexible staff members in the building. This is truly why we feel we need to show our TA's how much we value their important work and appreciate your help to do just that.

Last, we were able to keep class sizes down for most classrooms and in most schools. As stated during our asks last year, small class sizes are allowing teachers to meet the district goal of providing inquiry based, differentiated experiences for all of our students. With projected enrollment growth in Arlington, we all will need to be sure to continue watching this closely and working to maintain the manageable class sizes that you helped us to finance last year.

As we move into thinking about next year, we have still kept our district goals in mind and are requesting support based on fulfilling these goals, as well as continuing to build on the momentum we are seeing based on investments that our town has made in the elementary school programming.

Our staff and community are committed to a system in which all students meet high standards. This requires continued support for our teachers in implementing rigorous standards based curriculum and instruction as well as our students receiving the extra supports needed when necessary to meet these standards. The Arlington Community has come to expect this for their children as well they should.

We have been very mindful at looking at data around our students with the highest need. Due to enrollment growth, this high needs group has grown. For example, for the first time the Bishop Elementary School has been recognized with a high needs subgroup. This means the high needs group of students is large enough to document.

As we look across our accountability data, we see our most noticeable achievement gap developing with students in high needs populations and their ability to meet yearly growth targets. What we are also seeing is a direct connection between rising enrollment, which is creating a resource gap directly tied to this high needs group.

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, we are asking for financial support in the following areas.

1. **We ask that we are able to sustain the resources given to support last year's requests that were discussed at the opening of our presentation. Those are full time social worker in each school building, STEM curriculum, and increased salary for teaching assistants. This will continue to help meet our goals for this year.**
2. As you all know, our Tools of the Mind program is a rigorous full day academic curriculum replacing a curriculum that emphasized morning academic programming. In order to implement this curriculum with integrity, a great deal of both academic and social emotional supports are needed. This program currently operates with a part time TA and this is not enough support. It is important that our students' first year with us serve as a foundation in developmentally appropriate rigor which we expect to grow vertically. Teachers are certainly not able to implement with the same rigor in the afternoon without an assistant. **To this end, we are again asking for full time teaching assistants in Kindergarten to support the delivery of the Tools of the Mind program with integrity and high quality for all students as it is meant to serve as foundation for future grade levels.**
3. **Due to increased enrollment, we find ourselves servicing a larger number of students, and we need adequate resources to support these children. Currently, we do not have the staff to address the sheer number of students being identified for support, both through special education and intervention.**

We know that best practice and research support a system where students experience the majority of their learning in their general education classrooms. In order to see this model rise to its fruition, we need to consider the rising caseloads of our learning specialists. They are keeping up with service commitments for students on IEP's, writing and maintaining all individualized plans for their students, attending all required team meetings, and attending meetings to be part of the RTI process for all children. Learning specialist are doing all this while keeping abreast of the curriculum and curriculum changes at up to three grade levels. This is quite a mammoth task.

We would like to see our learning specialists be a more intimate team with eight or less teachers and no more than two grade levels. This would allow more common planning time, more co-teaching, more thoughtful differentiation at the beginning of each curricular unit to assist our high needs subgroup students. **To this end, we are asking for four additional specialists, with each having a TA to support, in order to address the need to build teacher capacity to adequately service students with diverse high needs.**

4. **As part of our support plan for teachers and students, we are exploring and beginning implementation of a coaching program in Arlington. Currently, both literacy and math**

coaches work with teachers to build their capacity as they educate a wide range of learners. The idea behind coaching is to help all staff members deliver a high quality curriculum that will meet the needs of all students. Coaches help to support the differentiation and delivery of instruction. They help to develop rigor, and build the capacity of teachers and special educators.

In addition, a group of educators consisting of math coaches, literacy coaches, principals, mentor teachers and Dr. Chesson are working to strengthen this program with the help of a distributed leadership workshop orchestrated by the Department of Education and consultants Education Delivery Institute. This work will help us to implement this program with success and allow the program to grow. Due to enrollment growth, our ability to afford all schools this coaching model is becoming more difficult. An increase in coaching staff will make our resources commensurate across the district. **To that end we support the district vision for increasing coaching staff at the elementary level as outlined by Dr. Chesson.**

5. & In order to avoid stalled implementation and leverage our investment so far, we are looking to continue our professional development around and acquisition of FOSS Science Curriculum. This curriculum has started what has been a need in our elementary schools and asked for by our communities, for quite some time. Next year, we need to complete the implementation in first through fifth grade. **To that end, we are requesting funding to continue the implementation of the updated FOSS science curriculum at all elementary schools.**
6. & We also hope to start a three year plan to overhaul the elementary mathematics curriculum. The new curriculum is aligned to the new common core state standards, in both process and content. Our request includes funding for mathematics curriculum updates for Kindergarten through grade two. This curriculum is common core aligned and supports differing types of learners.
7. & You will see on your budget sheet that we are asking for a variety of much needed curriculum materials. These include Lucy Calkins kits for new classrooms, LLI kits for schools that don't have them, math manipulatives and non-fiction reading materials aligned with the common core state standards.

In closing, the elementary school principals are looking to continue building small grade level teams of educators that include, classroom teachers, special educators and their TA's, math and literacy coaches, social work support, and additional support staff. With this in place, it will be our goal to build the capacity of all who work with our students so that they may provide rigorous opportunities for students in which all are able to engage and access successfully.

We hope that in speaking with you today you are able to understand how important it is to be mindful of our enrollment growth and that we feel it our responsibility to be proactive around this growth so that we can continue to give the Arlington Community the high quality education they have come to expect from us as a school district. We feel that momentum around these initiatives is key, and when we are unable to support and keep up the momentum, it derails students, teachers and administrators. We know that with your support around these initiatives we will be able to sustain momentum and provide a rigorous, equitable education for all types of learners.

School committee members, we thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening. 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.