

January 26, 2011

Dear Parents and Community Members,

In the school world, the opening day in September begins a new year. However, it is difficult, as we begin a new calendar year, not to look back at the accomplishments and challenges of the past calendar year even as we look forward with hope and expectations.

Looking at 2010 retrospectively, the Arlington community can be very proud of its schools. Our students continue to perform at high levels in academics, performing and visual arts, athletics, and community involvement. Very able, professional, and hardworking teachers and staff support their efforts daily. If you look below you will see some of our accomplishments and highlights.

Our expectation and hope for 2011, as always, is that this success will continue and we will improve. However, 2011 will present challenges. We know that our ability to provide the support and services that has been essential for past success will be compromised by the projected budget shortfall. The expected \$3.3 million shortfall for the 2011-2012 school year follows on the heels of a \$3.9 million budget reduction affecting the current year. The increased fees (painful as they are) kept our shortfall for this year from being \$4.4 million.

The Administration will be making presentations to the School Committee on the impact of a \$3.3 million budget reduction this month and at the February 8 meeting. Mr. Skidmore, Principal of Arlington High School, discussed the impact of these budget reductions on the high school at the January 11 School Committee meeting. Fourteen to sixteen teacher/staff positions are projected to be reduced. The impact on students with the loss of these positions will include, for example, the elimination of double block math and English classes for students who struggle with the curriculum, longer turn-around time on corrected assignments and assessments, fewer elective courses, less time and longer waiting time for guidance counselors to meet with individual students.

The School Committee's Budget Subcommittee hosted a Parent Forum for high school parents on Monday, January 24 at 7:00 pm in the media center. Mr. Skidmore again presented an overview of the impact of budget reductions. Parents had the opportunity to express concerns, make suggestions and ask questions.

Mr. Ruggere, Principal of Ottoson Middle School, presented the impact of budget reductions at the January 25 School Committee meeting. The impact on the middle school is similar to that of the high school. Additionally, with fewer core teachers it will not be possible to maintain the cluster model that allows teachers to focus on only one-third of the students at a particular grade. The cluster model promotes greater teacher collaboration and individualized attention for students.

The Budget Subcommittee will host a Parent Forum for middle school parents on Thursday, February 3 at 7:00 pm in the Ottoson media center.

Elementary Principals will discuss the elementary impact at the February 8 School Committee Meeting. The date for the Parent Forum will be posted on our website.

The School Committee FY12 (2011-2012 school year) budget timeline has been posted on our website. The School Committee will vote on a budget to send to Town Meeting on March 8. All community members are invited to attend the parent forums.

While another \$3 million plus budget reduction will affect services to students, the Arlington Public School teachers, administrators and staff remain committed to providing a high quality education to all of our students and will continue to work to the best of our ability to help each student achieve his/her greatest potential.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

## **Arlington Public Schools – 2010 Accomplishments, Strengths, and Recognitions**

### **HIGH ACHIEVEMENT:**

#### **1. Stratton Elementary School awarded Blue Ribbon designation by the US Department of Education**

The 2010-2011 school year opened with some very good news. Stratton Elementary School was selected as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. The Arlington Public Schools are proud of this extraordinary recognition and congratulate the principal, staff and students of Stratton for this great honor.

The Blue Ribbons Schools Program, which began in 1982, “honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools whose students achieve at very high levels or have made significant progress and helped close gaps in achievement, especially among disadvantaged and minority students. The program is part of a larger Department of Education effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about best school leadership and teaching practices.” (U.S. Dept. of Education).

#### **2. Arlington High School recognized as one of top 50 public high schools in Massachusetts**

In the September edition of Boston Magazine, Arlington High School was recognized as one of the top 50 public high schools in the state. It is noteworthy that 35 of the 50 high schools had a larger per pupil cost than Arlington. The average cost for the 34 schools that ranked ahead of Arlington High School was \$14,223. Weston, which was ranked number one on the list, has a per pupil cost of \$18,023. Arlington’s per pupil cost is \$11,813.

**3. Arlington High School received Silver Medal from US New and World Report's Awards for Best Public High Schools** in 2010 in recognition of high student achievement and college readiness.

#### **4. High Elementary MCAS Scores**

The Boston Globe (September 15) identified the schools that were the highest performers on MCAS in Reading, English, Mathematics, and Science for grades 3-8 and 10.

Brackett was among the highest performers in the state for Third Grade Reading (#4), Fourth Grade English (#2), Fifth Grade English (#2); Fifth Grade Math (#2); Fifth Grade Science (#1).

Stratton was among the highest performers for Fifth Grade Math (#3); Fifth Grade Science (#6).

Peirce was among the highest performers for Fifth Grade Science (#4).

In September 2010, because of these results, the Governor and the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identified Arlington High School and three elementary schools, Brackett, Peirce and Stratton, as Commendation Schools for High Growth in Student Achievement.

#### **5. High Scoring Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for ELL**

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) monitors progress for English Language Learners (ELL) students in grades K-12 in three categories: (1) progress toward acquiring English language proficiency; (2) attainment of English language proficiency; and (3) Adequate Yearly Progress of the LEP subgroup in both English language arts and mathematics.

In all three categories, our students performed very well and well met the AMAO targets. In category #1, the district performance was 88% compared to the state's target of 60%. In category #2, the district's performance was 43% compared to the state's target of 25%. In category #3, the district made AYP in both English and mathematics. Our ELL Program has consistently scored well over the last four years.

#### **6. Music Program Recognized for Excellence – Middle School Orchestra invited to Perform at Music Educators Conference in March, 2010**

The middle school orchestra performed at the Massachusetts Music Educators Conference. The invitation to perform at the conference, which is a coveted honor, is only extended to school musical groups considered to be excellent by the Association.

**7. Commendable Advanced Placement Scores** achieved by last year's Juniors and Seniors (Spring, 2010):

- 25 students were AP scholars. This designation is granted to students who receive scores of 3 or higher (highest score is 5) on 3 or more AP exams.
- 18 students were AP Scholars with Honors. This designation is granted to students who received an average of score of at least 3.25 on all AP exams taken and scores of 3 or higher on 4 or more of these exams.
- 16 students were AP Scholars with Distinction. This designation is granted to students who received an average grade of at least 3.5 on all AP exams and grades of 3 or higher on 5 or more of these exams.

## **STUDENT NOTABLES:**

### **1. College Acceptances:**

According to The Senior Survey (a self report completed by all seniors), 90% of our students were accepted to their first or second choice college and 100% were accepted to their first, second, or third choice college.

### **2. Arlington #1 in MA for Lowest Obesity Rate Among Students in Massachusetts**

In 2010, Arlington Public Schools had the lowest obesity rate among all of the districts in the state. Much of the credit for this designation goes to the extensive physical education and wellness programming available to students, which has been developed by the Director of Health, Wellness, and Guidance, the faculty in the Physical Education Department, and the Arlington Board of Health. Food service provides many healthy choice foods, including a salad bar at both the middle and high school. No foods are fried.

### **3. Scholastic Art Awards**

Two AHS students were named Gold and Silver Scholastic Art Award winners (April 2010). This award is the highest national award in art for high school students.

### **4. Additional AHS student achievements:**

- Four distinguished speaker awards at the University of Pennsylvania's Model Congress
- One student recognized as a Daughter of the American Revolution Good Citizen
- One student received the Mass Bar Association's Good Citizen award
- Five students named James Otis Scholars by the American Board of Trial Advocates
- Two students won the AFL-CIO labor history scholarship exam
- Fifteen awards for artwork from 2010 Boston Globe Scholastic Awards Competition

- One student won a Grand Prize from Boston Pops Art Competition and her artwork was displayed on screens in Symphony Hall during a Boston Pops performance, and on [www.bostonpops.org](http://www.bostonpops.org)
- Cheerleaders invited to take part in Gator Bowl in Florida
- Ottoson Lego Teams qualify for state tournament at WPI; 8<sup>th</sup> grade team wins lightening round
- All league awards in most sports
- Three students won First Prize (Premier Prix) in Le Grand Concours, a national French Language award sponsored by L' Association américaine des professeurs de français
- High school students raised \$50,000 for cancer research through Relay for Life.

### **TEACHER NOTABLES:**

Cheryl Christo, AHS chorus teacher, was named one of ten semi-finalists for 2010 Teacher of the Year.

### **BUILDING PROJECTS:**

Arlington has made the financial commitment to rebuild or renovate all of its seven elementary schools. To date, five of the seven elementary schools have been rebuilt. During most of 2010, the district has been engaged in a feasibility study for **Thompson Elementary School** with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). A MSBA Board vote is expected in February on the preferred option.

Since the remaining elementary school, **Stratton**, may not undergo extensive renovation for 5-8 years, a multi-year capital plan to replace the roof, windows, and infrastructure systems was developed and implemented this year. The MSBA has preliminarily accepted Arlington into their Green Repair Program, which will help fund essential infrastructure improvements at Stratton.

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT:**

**1. Bridge The Gap Fund:** In the face of a \$3.9 million FY11 budget reduction, the community raised nearly \$600,000 in private funds to offset the deficit ( ) in just two months (May and June) to fund positions that would otherwise not have been funded.

**2. Booster Clubs** support athletic teams and the music and art programs.

**3. The Arlington Education Foundation (AEF)** raises money annually to support initiatives in the school district.

This year's major AEF grant, which totaled \$52,200, includes funding for the third and final year of supporting *Enriching Elementary Education* which supported the integration of global themes into the elementary social studies and literacy curriculum. In addition, it allowed the District to start planning for its key goal of improving math differentiation and support while integrating the sciences and technology into the elementary and middle school curriculum. Several teachers and administrators attended the Gateway Institute at the Museum of Science and met for several days afterwards to work on a plan to link the elementary, middle and high school technology and engineering efforts. AEF funds also allowed the purchase of key math curriculum materials for all the elementary schools.

In the 2010 school year, AEF also approved an additional \$26,000 in smaller "Innovation Grants" to support teachers and schools in projects that ranged from supporting the introduction of online learning at the High School to mindfulness and yoga at an elementary school. Smaller grants such as these are approved in the spring and the fall each year.

**4. Anonymous Arlington donors** have provided funds to create a \$75,000 scholarship fund for the instrumental program and \$15,000 to begin offering Mandarin Chinese at the high school this year.

## **APS INFRASTRUCTURE/TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION POSITIVES:**

**1. New budget tracking systems** have been developed, including a **position control** database. A new purchasing procedures manual has been created and new guidelines have been instituted.

**2. Parents and students at Arlington High School and Ottoson Middle School** received the ability to use the **Parent Portal** to view the on-line grading system. This access takes the place of warning notes and excess absence slips. Students and parents can use this internet tool to see how they or their students are doing in classes. Students can use this information in discussions with teachers before or after school in order to learn what they need to do to improve their grades. Parents can view the information to support their students in following-up with their teachers.

**3. Alert Now** is a new cost-effective way to inform parents about absences from high school with phone calls and e-mails sent automatically. This service ties into Powerschool to access current student contact information.

4. The District built a new **self-service list server** allowing parents to sign-up for e-mail lists at all schools through the District's home page.

5. Arlington Public Schools upgraded its **web infrastructure** over the summer, moving to a Google environment for e-mail, and using cloud computing for Google Docs, Calendar, and Google Sites both for administrators and classroom teachers. Also, teachers now have remote access to their classroom desktops through the installation of a **Citrix remote desktop service**.

6. Arlington Public Schools re-built the **core network infrastructure** for the District, providing greater reliability and speed and positioning the District to access future technology upgrades. In addition, the District installed a 10-fold increase in **internet bandwidth capacity** to support the increased use of web-based teaching and learning. The District also built a virtual computing environment at the Ottoson Middle School to support the student computer lab. This virtual environment will also serve as a **disaster recovery back-up** site. The technology efforts this summer also included standardizing across all town and school computers a **new virus protection** service to optimize computing security.

7. Arlington Public Schools **upgraded its copiers** to achieve several goals: a) decreased use of paper and supplies through scanning and electronic transfer of documents, b) more cost-efficient printing using copiers instead of printers, and c) consolidating all copier rentals to one vendor for town and school.

#### **GRANTS AWARDED: (Julie Dunn, APS Grant Writer)**

The Arlington Education Foundation's Enriching Elementary Education grant mentioned in the Community Support section of this newsletter was also described in detail in the September 2010 Superintendent's Newsletter. This section highlights one of the smaller Innovation Grants funded by AEF, a \$5,000 ***Online Independent Study Courses for High School Students*** grant.

This grant allows students to use technology to access free on-line courses at Arlington High School, as well as during after school hours. By incorporating online courses, AHS has expanded the course curriculum and is offering new resources to enrich and enliven the high school curriculum. The grant also paid for wireless internet access in the media center and cafeteria.

This past summer, AHS teachers, supported by grant funds, explored a wide variety of free online course resources to find appropriate courses to adapt, or to determine classes that could be developed internally. A narrow list of courses was chosen for further development. AHS teachers then prepared the courses for AHS, both by adapting courses from online providers and by developing their own courses. The following courses are the result, with 20 students enrolled for high school credit this semester, and well over 30 already enrolled for next semester.

- Mythology, a new course written by an AHS teacher
- Introduction to Psychology, based on a Yale University course - students are watching Yale lectures, but AHS teachers wrote the discussion questions, the midterm, and developed the final project
- The Science of Sports, adapted by an AHS teacher from an MIT course
- Online Book Club, developed by AHS teachers working in conjunction with Robbins Library to research current adolescent reading trends, and incorporating the Scholastic Reading Resources for the discussion board of this class

Arlington teachers review student work and grade the students taking the classes. These new on-line independent study courses offer enriched content beyond the core curriculum that can invigorate the junior and senior years of high school. The courses also allow students to fill study and other empty time in their school-day schedules with meaningful and rigorous academic work while acquiring 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as independent learning, technological literacy, and accountability for college and eventually the workplace.

Arlington has recently been the recipient of a number of competitive grants that have and will improve teaching and learning and emergency preparedness. Grants include:

- **Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools**, \$99,000, 18 month federal grant for emergency planning is reaching completion this month.
- **Teaching American History**, nearly \$1 million, 3-year grant, that provides professional development for teachers K-12 and classroom materials for students in grades 3-12. Arlington is the leader of a collaborative of seven districts sharing in the grant.
- **Focus on Math**, a continuation of a 7-year NSF grant, which provides math professional development for teachers in grades 5-12.
- **Verizon Think Ahead Grant** provides professional development in science and engineering for teachers K-12 and funding for a robotics and engineering club in the high school.