

# ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Dear Parents/Guardians and Community Members,

It is with profound gratitude that the entire Arlington Public Schools community receives the results of this month's override vote. The vote to increase local property taxes so your schools and town can provide you with the level of services you value confers both an enormous gift and an equally enormous responsibility on all of us who work with and for your children, both directly in our classrooms, and in every support and administrative capacity. Particularly in these difficult economic times when many Arlington residents have made personal sacrifices in order to make ends meet, we know this vote was not made lightly, but only after serious reflection regarding personal, family, and community priorities. This vote represents both a serious financial commitment to education and a serious choice in difficult times. The task of the APS now is to redouble our focus on providing what is best for all students, and to maximize the value of every dollar spent in the department.

To give a sense of the school district in the immediate days following the vote, it felt like the world changed on June 7. Prior to the vote, the whole school department was focused on how to attempt to preserve quality service with a greatly reduced teaching staff. But on June 8, when we learned we would not be dismantling quality classrooms and saying good-bye to excellent teachers, there were tears, laughter, hugs, high-fives, exhilaration and an overwhelming sense of gratitude. "Joyful recommitment to excellent work" might be one way to summarize the emotional impact of this vote on those who work with your children.

With last year's generous gift from the Bridge the Gap Fund, and this year's override vote, we know that high expectations and high commitment are shared between both the schools and the community. This shared commitment will help keep our schools strong and improving.

The rest of this newsletter shares other recent district developments. Some honors and awards bear repeating, such as Stratton School being named a Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education, and Arlington High School being honored with a Silver Medal from US News & World Report's Awards for Best Public High Schools in 2010, and by Boston Magazine as one of the top 50 public high schools in the state. Arlington High School was also honored by The College Board as one of 388 schools across the country where the number of Advanced Placement exams taken is increasing while the number of students scoring 3 or higher is also remaining the same or increasing. The achievement recognized by these awards allowed 90% of our students to be accepted to their first, second, or third choice college or university. Recent highlights follow. In order to find a longer version on both individual schools and departments, you may go to section 4, 2010-2011 APS Selected Highlights and Accomplishments of the *FY12 Budget Book for Town Meeting*, at <http://www.arlington.k12.ma.us/administration/budget/fy12/fy12budgetbooktownmeetingapril2011.pdf>

Again, thank you, on behalf of all school department faculty members, administrators and support staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Bodie".

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of School

**Elementary accomplishments:**

- This past year, the third grade teachers implemented the Lucy Calkins Writing Program in their classrooms. Lucy Calkins is a state-of-the-art writing program that uses a workshop approach to engage students in writing about what is meaningful in their lives. This spring, the Arlington Education Foundation awarded a grant for the expansion of the Lucy Calkins program into the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. With this combination of district and grant funds, the district has been able to purchase the Lucy Calkins Units of Study Kits as well as support a program of professional development for teachers of this highly successful writing program.
- The first year of the special education Inclusion Program at Peirce Elementary School for grades 1 - 5 has received accolades from parents. Parents report that their children who previously did not like going to school now love going to school. One parent commented, "I find him picking up a book on his own and getting invited for play dates and birthday parties. That never happened in his old school". Parents of general education students have voiced a desire for their child to be placed in one of the inclusion classes next year, due to the lower student-teacher ratio.
- Over four hundred fifth graders submitted their artwork to the Arlington Center for the Arts "Images of Arlington" competition and 48 students won awards for their outstanding artwork.
- Teachers in grades K-2, as well as special education and English Language Learner teachers, have been trained to administer *Assessing Mathematical Concepts*, which assess mathematical development knowledge and skills in order to provide targeted interventions to support students who struggle with mathematics.
- The Bishop School proudly announced that a very talented new principal, Mark McAneny, was hired to lead the school.
- Several elementary schools integrated more technology into their methods for teaching. Stratton PTO funded the purchase of Raz-Kids, an online resource for interactive ebooks that enables instructors to evaluate the effectiveness of homework and also to extend reading instruction time each day. Impressed with the impact of the Raz-Kids initiative at Stratton, the APS will be acquiring it for all the elementary schools for the 2011-2012 school year. Many elementary students were encouraged to use tools such as Glogster to create photostories and podcasts and to write blogs to demonstrate their learning, and in some schools weekly technology lessons were incorporated into the library/media program to enhance 21st century skills.

**Ottoson Middle School accomplishments:**

- A school-wide effort to address issues related to bullying prevention included a wide variety of activities, many springing from the "A World of Difference" initiative. Activities included monthly Task Force meetings, staff training, school-wide assemblies, a 4-day Peer Leader training, weekly Peer Leader/Advisor Meetings, classroom implementation, and student attendance at a state World of Difference conference.
- All Social Studies teachers took part in a Using Technology to Build Global Classrooms workshop provided by Primary Source (APS membership funded by the Arlington Education Foundation). Sessions focused on using technology to access global literature, including online book trailers and electronic databases and bibliographies, and integrating global technology across the curriculum, for example, linking classrooms across national borders using Skype and VoiceThread.

- Eighth grade teacher Julianna Keyes was selected as a teacher trainer by the US State Department, and sent for a two-week training session to work with teachers in Argentina.
- ELMO document cameras were introduced into the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade social studies classrooms, facilitating the use of primary sources and sharing of student work.
- In June, the Ottoson Middle School Band and Orchestra, under the direction of Paula Demetrio and Jing-huey Wei, were both gold medal winners at the Great East Music Festival in Nashua, NH, competing against bands and orchestras from all over New England.
- The middle school orchestra under the direction Jing-Huey Wei performed at the Massachusetts Music Educators Conference at the Boston Seaport Hotel. 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. The orchestra performed an original piece composed by Pasquale Tassone, Director of Performing Arts K-12.
- Two of the twelve Ottoson Robotics Teams, under the guidance of teachers Gary Blanchette and Julie McDaniels, qualified for the state competition in December at WPI in Worcester. There were 46 teams in total that have qualified for the state level of competition.
- Ottoson grade 7 students, parents and administration held a dance to raise funds for Japan. They were successful in raising \$4,000. The idea for the event came from the students.
- Ottoson had a "Welcome the Parents Breakfast" for incoming grade 6 parents. Staff and administration was there to answer questions and greet parents. We had over 50 parents in attendance. The breakfast was sponsored by OPAC and was a huge success.
- Ms. Kilgore and the students did a wonderful job of putting on The Music Man in March.

#### **Arlington High School accomplishments:**

- The AHS World Language Department implemented a Mandarin Chinese course as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives focusing on the shrinking world. This is the first time a non-European language has been offered at the high school. Twenty-five students were enrolled in the course taught by XiaQing Rotstein, and they did remarkably well. Initiating Mandarin into AHS has been a dream of a community member, Barney Maier, who with much energy, hard work and commitment, brought funding ideas and contacts with the Mandarin teaching community to AHS. Mr. Maier identified a local donor who was willing to fund the first year of Arlington's Mandarin program, and this donor has agreed to make another gift for the 2011-2012 school year. Many students are interested in continuing their Mandarin studies, so we are especially grateful to our donor and Barney Maier for bringing this about.

For the coming school year, AHS is excited to be able to grow its Mandarin class offerings through the award of a Mandarin teacher from China by the Teachers of Critical Languages Program, a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State, and implemented by American Councils for International Education.

- According to The Senior Survey, a self report completed by all seniors, 60% of our students were accepted to their first choice college, 82% were accepted to their first or second choice college, and 90% of our students were accepted to their first, second, or third choice college or university.

- In athletic accomplishments, Athletic Director Ted Dever reports
  - Our cheerleaders won the DCL(Dual County League) cheering competition, and they also performed at the Gator Bowl in December, fundraising the majority of the money to pay for the trip themselves
  - the football team beat Arlington Catholic on Thanksgiving for the first time
  - Our boys soccer team made the quarterfinals before losing 2-1 to Winchester
  - Our girls basketball team made the tournament and won their first round game
  - Our girls hockey team made the state tournament as well as our Wrestling team
  - Our wrestling team won the DCL
  - We had two individual state champions in track and wrestling
  - This spring both our baseball and softball teams made the state tournament and the baseball team was DCL champion
  - Our boys volleyball team made the tournament for the first time
  - The Boston Globe chose three students (track, boys tennis, girls ice hockey) to be recognized as All Scholastic.
  
- Two Arlington High School students won scholarships by winning the poster design contest for the Arlington International Film and Video Festival. Another ten AHS students were finalists in this competition.
  
- Eighteen AHS high school students won Gold and Silver Key awards in the 2011 Scholastic Art Awards Competition in one of AHS's best years ever.
  
- AHS's English Language Learners produced a booklet of original poems titled "Where I'm From", giving voice to their unique stories of life in their countries of origin and as students in Arlington, even as they work to master expressing themselves in English.
  
- The AHS Robotics Team hosted twenty high schools in a robotics competition in the Toz Gym in January and then went on to compete in the regional competition in Palmer, MA. Also, the 8 students on the AHS Junior Engineering and Technology Society Team scored first in the state competition and among the top 10 in the nation in February.
  
- METCO Director Stephen Pereira accompanied seven AHS students, a combined group of Arlington residents and Boston residents (METCO) to the two-day Greater Boston Student of Color Achievement Network conference at Brookline High School this March.
  
- A group of AHS students self-organized to participate in the WGBH High School Quiz Show television program, and made it into the finals round.
  
- The Gilbert and Sullivan Society school musical this year was Disney's *Beauty And The Beast* which ran for three sold-out performances over the March 25 – 27 weekend.
  
- The AHS Jazz Band was asked to perform at the State House as part of the official Massachusetts celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reunification of Italy.
  
- Judges at the annual Math Fair held at AHS noted that this year's entrants were the strongest since the fair began eight years ago. Eight projects (13 students) were selected by the judges to be exhibited at the 8th Annual *Focus on Mathematics'* Mathematics Exposition at The Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation in Waltham on June 11.

- Kambiz Vatan, mathematics and CADD teacher, gave the following advantages AHS students have gained from the CADD program:
  - Students are provided hands-on learning using industry standard software (AutoCAD, Autodesk, Solidworks) and a 3D printer.
  - Students engage in both collaborative and independent learning, which prepares them for higher education. Students are able to explore engineering concepts at a range of rigor to match their interest and ability. A recent graduate who had elected four years of CADD was allowed at UMass Lowell to participate in a senior engineering project as a freshman.
  - Students have worked on “real-life” projects such as developing plans for climbing structures in Arlington for permitting purposes, floor plans for the high school, and design modifications for AHS’s media center.

**District-wide developments include:**

- The APS undertook a broad initiative as part of the implementation of its anti-bullying work. In September 2010 a Task Force comprised of teachers, students, parents, administrators and community members was formed to drive the development of the APS Bullying Prevention Plan. The plan was submitted to the state in December 2010, approved in February 2011 and resulted in Anti-Bullying Program Protocols to provide a safer environment for students. The district provided professional development on the skills of recognizing, responding and reporting incidences of bullying in school and on school property for all staff. A revised Code of Discipline and the Acceptable Use Policy for Technology and the Internet was adopted for students and staff. Multiple curriculum initiatives took place at all levels. For a report on all activities, go to <http://www.arlington.k12.ma.us/administration/bullyingprevention/pdfs/apsbullyingprevalaccomplishments06-22-11.pdf>
- Plans to re-build the Thompson School with partial funding (47.2%) from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) are moving ahead following the unanimous vote of Town Meeting in May. While relocation to other district schools is a necessary, but temporary, disruption to routines, the excitement of building a state-of-the-art elementary school on the site gives cause for celebration.
- Stratton School is undertaking a multi-year capital plan to replace the roof, windows and infrastructure systems, and its recent acceptance into the MSBA’s Green Repair Program will help fund these essential improvements.
- “From The Superintendent’s Corner,” a new show on ACMI this spring, highlighted student activities and classes at Arlington High School. The featured programs included the survival class, the backpacking trip, and the rope course in the Physical Education Department. Counselors explained the services offered in the Guidance Department. Mr. Skidmore was interviewed about the World Language Department. Students talked about the trips they had taken to France and Costa Rica. Students who attended the Model Congress in Philadelphia recounted their experience. Math students talked about their projects entered in the Math Fair. The Science Department was represented with segments on the Enviro Garden, robotics and kayak building. <http://acmi.tv/programming/education-channel/> to see when they are available for viewing.
- Parent communication improved as 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.

- The following improvements occurred on the administrative side in order to increase transparency & accountability:
  - Position control system created
  - New chart of accounts
  - Monthly financial reporting accessible online
  - Revised budget document including greater level of narrative on both summary & detail levels
  - Revised purchasing procedures
  - Restructured business office staff
  - Ongoing Special Education cost containment
  - New budget tracking systems have been developed, including a position control database

**The APS has benefited from a number of recent grants:**

- The Arlington Education Foundation (AEF) funded its first two \$10,000 Development and Expansion Grants
  - As noted earlier, AEF funded the Lucy Calkins Writing Program for Grades Four and Five.
  - AEF funded the purchase of LCD projectors to support teaching and student learning across the district. This funding was combined with district funds, and the total investment allowed the district to equalize access to this equipment across departments and grade levels. LCD projectors give teachers the opportunity to use visually stimulating technology to create an internet-connected classroom, allowing multi-media presentations by teachers and students.
  
- The APS is completing activities funded by AEF's multi-year "Enriching Elementary Education" grant that supported the integration of global themes into Social Studies and literacy curricula. This year's grant also 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, in part by making the necessary investment to bring the Museum of Science's Engineering is Elementary program into the early grades next year. AEF funds also allowed the purchase of key math curriculum materials for all the elementary schools, along with professional development for teachers in order to make the best use of the materials.
  
- This spring AEF awarded seven Innovation in Education grants for a total of nearly \$10,000, on top of the \$14,500 for eight Innovation grants funded in the fall. These grants allowed Arlington to establish a new college-level economics class at Arlington High School, a pioneering Gay Straight Alliance at the Ottoson Middle School, and to support reading, science, engineering, archaeology, and technology projects in the elementary schools.
  
- The \$1 million, 3-year Teaching American History federal grant is providing professional development for elementary teachers and classroom materials for students in grades 3, 4, and 5. Arlington is the leader of a collaborative of seven districts sharing in the grant. Arlington teachers have attended several workshops on topics ranging from Using an MLA-Based Research and Writing Program to Enhance the Teaching of US History to a workshop at the Smith Museum/Arlington Historical Society on resources and pedagogy training for teaching about the history of Arlington and the Native American roots of Massachusetts to a full day History Alive training by the Teacher's Curriculum

Institute. Eight Arlington teachers will also attend a 10-day Summer Content Institute for Teachers: Revolutionary Ideals, People, and Places (1607-1775). This institute, held at Framingham State University, will provide teachers with lectures from top American history scholars and site visits to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Old South Meeting House, the Paul Revere House, The Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Martha's Vineyard African American Heritage trail. Additionally, teachers will learn best pedagogy practices for teaching history through training from the Gilder Lehrman

Institute for American History and from Discovery Education Streaming. Arlington teachers have also been funded to participate in an online course offered through the Library of Congress and a three-day summer workshop at the Spellman Museum of Stamps and Postal History at Regis College.

- Two Ottoson technology teachers, Gary Blanchette and Alison Oropallo, were awarded a \$5,000 “Green in the Middle” Service Learning Grant from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to become members of a professional learning community with other teachers from across the state, as well as with DESE staff, to create and/or adapt curricula that uses community service learning to teach grade 6-8 technology/engineering standards. The curricula created by these teachers, a Renewable Energy Solar Cooker and a Pneumatic Robot Arm, will be used both at Ottoson and at other middle schools, and these technology teachers were able to learn additional curricula from their peers at other schools.
- Ottoson Middle School was awarded a \$2,500 state-funded Anti-Bullying Service Learning Grant that supported students in a project they called “Building Your School Family.” Students interviewed a classmate that they wouldn’t normally know and created a writing piece demonstrating what they had learned about their partner. Participants noted that even if the two did not become friends in the process, they would be more likely to stick up for one another if one were to become a target of bullying. The service portion of the project involved three Ottoson students who, due to cognitive impairments, do not attend the same classes as most of our students. They left their classroom to play games with the participating cluster students during their directed study. The students and their advisors saw tremendous progress in the feeling of connectedness between the three special needs students and our cluster students. They report, “One special needs boy in particular was very shy and hesitant at first, but has formed relationships with some of our cluster students. We used to have trouble getting him in the classroom to play--now we have trouble getting him out when the period is over!” See the full project by browsing projects at <http://www.resources21.org/cl/contextual.asp> and viewing “Building Your School Family”.