

# ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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News from December 2017

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members,

I am happy to report that we have established dates for a series of AHS Project Community Forums, and I hope that many of you will be able to attend the forums planned. We are in the Feasibility Phase of the renovation/rebuild of Arlington High School. An interactive Kick-Off meeting was held on January 10 at Town Hall. The project schedule and study process was the focus of this meeting, which included facilitated small group brainstorming discussions with a sharing of the results to those in attendance. Additional sessions are scheduled monthly: February 7, March 5 and April 4. Each session will run from 7:00-9:00 pm in Town Hall.

We are in the process of creating a 60-member AHS Educational Visioning Committee that will include educators, students, parents of children of all ages, School Committee members, Town officials, AHS Building Committee members, as well as other members from the Arlington community. This group will meet three times in January and February to delve deeply into creating the Educational Vision for the Arlington High School. David Stephen of [New Vista](#) will serve as the facilitator. Mr. Stephen worked with us previously, facilitating the teacher and community input for the Gibbs School project.

The AHS Project Community Forums and the AHS Educational Visioning Committee are important components of the planning process as we move forward in making improvements to Arlington High School. I look forward to reporting on their progress in subsequent newsletters. To learn more about the AHS project, and to sign-up to receive updates by email, visit [www.ahsbuilding.org](http://www.ahsbuilding.org). You may also follow the progress on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ahsbuilding/](https://www.facebook.com/ahsbuilding/). For specific information about the Feasibility Phase of the project, visit <https://ahsbuilding.org/blog/feasibility-study-overview/>.

The holiday spirit was strong throughout Arlington Public Schools during December. Our schools were strong supporters of [Arlington's Department of Health and Human Services](#) Holiday Help Program, signing up to purchase gifts for families facing challenging circumstances this season. The Dallin school community came together to collect cash donations that were used to purchase supplies needed by the Puerto Rican victims of Hurricane Maria. Winter coats for donation to [Boston Health Care](#) for the Homeless were collected at Hardy, and the Peirce Cookie Decorating Party included a Holiday Card station where students made cards that were distributed to elders by the [Arlington Council on Aging](#).

Arlington High School students were also busy with service projects during December. Every day after school during the holiday season, the DoSomething and Interact Club wrapped gifts, raising money for the [Arlington Food Pantry](#). This project, which has happened annually since 2012, charges \$2.00/gift, and includes transport of the items to and from teachers' cars. The AHS Dance Club hosted a one-day Global Goods fundraiser, collecting money for charity through the sale of goods from around the world. Thirty members of the boys' basketball program were on hand at 5:30 am one weekend to help the Boys and Girls Club with their Christmas tree sale. These examples are just some of the generous and loving ways our young people contribute to the health and welfare of others. I thank all the students, parents, teachers and staff who support and encourage this work.

I know you will enjoy reading the following articles about the wonderful things that happened in our schools as 2017 came to an end. I know that 2018 will be filled with more special moments and significant accomplishments in our district, and I look forward to sharing them with you in future newsletters.

Best regards,

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

## **Headline View**

### **Safe & Supportive Schools**

#### ***Dangers of Underage Drinking Understood by 83% of Survey Respondents***

This month, the [Arlington Youth Health & Safety Coalition](#) reports that the spring 2016 Parent Norm survey shows that 83% of respondents understand the dangers associated with underage drinking. [Read more>](#)

#### ***Wellness Day Raises Mental Health and Self-Care Awareness at Arlington High School***

All students participated in Wellness Day, a half-day event that featured an assembly by [Deconstructing Stigma](#), and Self-Care and Healthy Choice & Decisions Workshops all designed to increase awareness and illustrate the importance of overall wellness and life balance. [Learn more>](#)

### **Department News**

#### ***Stratton Open House and Ribbon Cutting Create Bridge between Old and New***

It was wonderful to see old friends and new come together to walk around the renovated Stratton Elementary School, and then to witness a ribbon cutting that formally marked the transition from the old building to the new physical space--one that is well suited to creating an organized, calm and energized environment for learning. [Read more>](#)

### **Professional Development**

#### ***Lesley University Courses Focus on Creating a Trauma Sensitive Learning Environment***

The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences make it important that we offer graduate-level courses from the [Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity](#) that educate our teachers and staff on the relationship between trauma and learning, and help them create a classroom that benefits all children--not just those with a trauma history. [Learn more>](#)

#### ***Mindfulness Class Promotes Educator Well-being and Eases Pressures***

*Mindfulness for Educators*, a free class offered this winter, is designed to assist teachers, staff and administrators handle stress, manage emotions and interact successfully with colleagues and students, leading to well-being that improves their ability to create safe and supportive classroom environments that promote learning. [Read more>](#)

### **Grants**

#### ***Arlington Education Foundation (AEF) Supports Educators through Continuing Scholar Awards***

Thanks to AEF [Continuing Scholar Awards](#), one Hardy teacher and one Stratton social worker will be able to pursue relevant and meaningful educational experiences beyond required professional development. [Learn more>](#)

#### ***Arlington Public Schools Receives State "Safe and Supportive Schools Grant"***

We are grateful to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for their grant in support of our ongoing *Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative*. [Read more>](#)

## Awards & Distinctions

### ***Students Deliver Distinguished Performances on National AMC 8 Exam***

I am happy to report that 60 students challenged themselves with the difficult [AMC 8](#) exam this November, and that the scores of several students were high enough to earn special recognition. Read more>

### ***"Empowering Girls "Conference Inspires and Instructs Ottoson Student Representatives***

Twenty eighth grade girls attended the two-day *Sixth Annual Empowering Girls Conference: Women with Vision* event this month that focused on leadership, self-discovery and setting goals in the face of obstacles, and provided time for the attendees to explore and express their personal visions. Learn more>

### ***AHS Athletes Named to Fall All-Scholastics Teams***

Recognized for academic and competitive excellence, boys soccer Captain Lloyd Cleary was named to the *Boys Soccer All-Scholastics Herald Team*, and Captain Ryan Oosting received *All-Scholastics* designation in boys cross country by the *Boston Herald* and *The Boston Globe*. Read more>

### ***Fifteen AHS Students Chosen for MMEA Northeastern District Senior Festival***

Arlington will be well represented at the [Music Educators Association \(MMEA\) Northeastern District Senior Festival](#) next month as nine students participate in the Chorus, four perform in the Orchestra and two more play in the Band. Nine students will go on to All-State auditions. Learn more>

### ***AHS Madrigal Singers Perform at Holy Trinity Armenian Church***

In exchange for their participation in the annual holiday concert at the Holy Trinity Armenian Church, the Madrigal Singers received a generous donation that will help fund the group's spring trip to Italy and Switzerland. Read more>

## Creative Highlights

### ***First Combined Music Technology-Chorale Concert Thrills with Live and Video Performances***

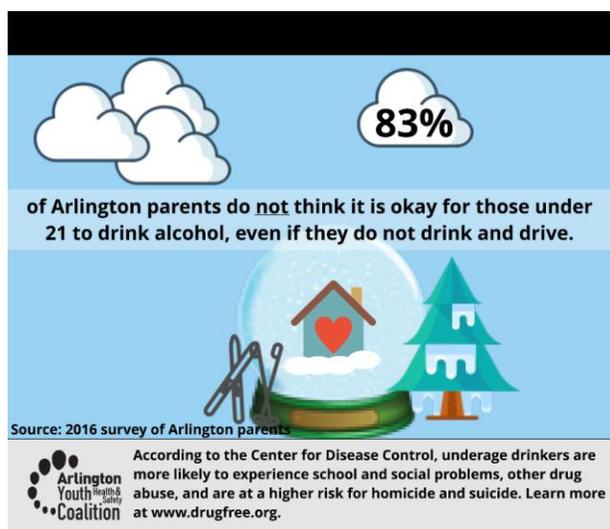
A student suggestion led to an impressive and powerful combined concert delivered by the Music Technology students and the AHS Chorale featuring unique live and video performances displaying the skills of the young musicians in the program. Learn more>

### ***Middle and High School Musicians and Vocalists Shine in Winter Concerts***

The winter concerts at Ottoson and Arlington High School showcased our talented young instrumentalists, conductors, composers and vocalists presenting a range of music that included a glorious performance of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, sung in German. Read more>

## Continue to read the full News from December newsletter

## Safe & Supportive Schools



### ***Dangers of Underage Drinking Understood by 83% of Survey Respondents***

Each month we present another positive result from the Parent Norm Survey conducted by the [Arlington Youth Health & Safety Coalition](#) (AYHSC) in spring 2016. I am happy to tell you that 83% of those responding know that alcohol consumption is not appropriate for young people under 21, regardless of whether or not they are going to drive. The Center for Disease Control reports multiple issues associated with underage drinking, including school and social problems, abuse of other substances, and an increased risk of homicide and suicide. We are grateful that so many parents understand these dangers, and are ready to reinforce APS and AYHSC efforts to combat alcohol usage among Arlington's teens.

### ***Wellness Day Raises Mental Health and Self-Care Awareness at Arlington High School***

"At the end of my first year, a 12th grader said to me she wished she knew I was here. She had a hard few years and didn't know where she could turn for help when she felt suicidal. I felt from that moment forward that it was important to get the word out to all students--not just those we respond to in hard moments--that we are here to help at AHS, that asking for help is admirable and important, that emotional issues are real and hard, and that taking care of yourself is essential, whether through counseling or some of the other options we offered during this year's program."

That quote comes from Intervention Coordinator/Social Worker Andrea Razi, the organizer of AHS Wellness Day held the morning of December 13. This was the 10th mental awareness program that she has coordinated at the high school. This year the range of the day was expanded to include overall wellness and the connection between self-care and maintaining our own health. In addition to decreasing the stigma associated with mental illness, the day was structured to present a variety of ways students can take care of themselves and reduce the stresses they face.

Each grade attended an assembly, two Self-Care Workshops and a Healthy Choice & Decisions Workshop. Students were asked to review the [Wellness Day brochure](#), choose the workshops that interested them, and sign-up in advance as some classes had limited space. [Deconstructing Stigma](#), a program of McLean Hospital, presented the assembly. The presentation featured young adults from all walks of life who shared their stories of coping with mental illness and the ways they have felt the stigma associated with their disease. The assembly helped to drive home the message that mental illness is real and can happen to anyone.

The Self-Care Workshops were led by AHS faculty and staff volunteers, and ranged from yoga to singing, knitting, physical activity, eating well, creating Zentangles and much more. External instructors from sponsoring agencies offered the Healthy Choice & Decisions Workshops that ranged from teen substance use to tools for managing stress, mindful games, and the impacts of anxiety, among many others.

Ms. Razi has received a lot of positive feedback about Wellness Day. The break from routine was most welcome, and there was a lot of enthusiasm for the Therapy Dog workshop--the overwhelming favorite for Self-Care. Students who struggle with anxiety and depression were glad that their peers were able to learn a little about what this is like.

Ms. Razi is grateful for Principal Matthew Janger's strong support, and for the efforts of the many individuals who helped make the day successful. These include Principal Intern Josh Corlew, who created the program, Media Director Stacy Kitsis who spent countless hours on scheduling, and Vice Principal William McCarthy, whose logistical skills kept the day running smoothly. Administrative Assistant Carolyn Simmons arranged a luncheon for the presenters, Tech guru Jeff Snyder and Francis Dabarera planned and supported the technology needs of the day and Intervention Coordinator/Social Worker Jess Klau joined Anne Benson during the event to keep things running smoothly.

I want to thank Ms. Razi, all of those mentioned above, the AHS teachers and staff that ran the workshops, the members of the AHS Bridge Builders Club who hosted the visiting agency presenters and the outside agencies who participated and shared their knowledge with our students. These include [Minding Your Mind](#), [McLean Hospital](#), [Middlesex Partnerships for Youth](#), [Families for Depression Awareness](#), [Samaritans](#), [Start Strong](#), [Arlington Youth Health and Safety Coalition](#) and the [Arlington Youth Counseling Center](#). I know that Ms. Razi is already considering ideas she has received for next year's event. Wellness Day is an important part of the many community building and student support efforts taking place at Arlington High School, and I will be reporting on more of these in subsequent newsletters.

## **Department News**



### ***Stratton Open House and Ribbon Cutting Create Bridge between Old and New***

Over the last two months, we have had the opportunity to highlight the renovated Stratton Elementary School, giving both the school and town communities a chance to embrace and celebrate the updated building. The first event took place on Sunday, November 19 and it was a pleasure to see several hundred people walking around the building, asking questions, renewing acquaintances and enjoying the new space. Former Stratton Principal Alan Brown was there, along with State Representative Sean Garballey, School Committee Chair Jeff Thielman, alumni and their families, former and current teachers and, of course, current Stratton families. We are fortunate that First Grade teacher Kim Pratt has saved some artifacts from the past, and these are now in a display case in the lobby.

Then, on December 13, the school district hosted a formal Ribbon Cutting in the cafeteria. Assistant Superintendent Rod MacNeal, Selectman Joe Curro, State Representative Sean Garballey School Committee member Bill Hayner, and Permanent Town Building Chair Alan Reedy were among the officials who joined Principal Hanna, six student representatives and me on stage. Everyone got a chance to say a few words, but the highlight was the remarks from the three kindergarten and three fifth grade students. The older children, having spent the first four years of their education in the old building, were able to talk about the changes they see. The younger students, never having known the old Stratton, reflected on what they see now and what excites them about the building. The ceremony ended as the students cut the ribbon, a shared moment that formally marked the transition from old school to new one.

The process used during the Stratton renovation was different from the other elementary building projects in that the renovation was a part of the everyday lives of the students, faculty and staff. Our other projects involved relocating the students and staff to other schools while the work was being done. At Stratton, however, we were able to establish a full "modular school" next to the old one. Everyone was aware of the work going on. They walked past the site every day, studied beside it and heard the noise, so that the school community felt part of the project. This made the sharing of the building with the wider community during these events especially meaningful.

These events were also a way for us to reflect on the commitment of the town of Arlington to our school district and its infrastructure. At the Ribbon Cutting, Mr. Hanna recognized a member of the Permanent Town Building Committee who has been tireless in his efforts to rebuild and renovate our schools. Back in

1993, John Cole, along with Bill Shea, Charlie Foskett and others, to begin a campaign to challenge our community to imagine the changes we could make to our elementary school buildings. We completed the first phase of the renovation/rebuilding of our seven schools with the Stratton opening, but as you know, we are now responding to the second phase of elementary school changes with additions to Thompson and Hardy. At the same time, we are preparing the Gibbs to house the sixth grade and starting on a renovation/rebuild of Arlington High School. For almost 25 years, Mr. Cole has been a champion of this work, and we are deeply grateful.

Mr. Hanna feels that the Stratton renovations have created a building better suited to our current elementary programs, particularly [Responsive Classroom](#). The physical space is neat, organized and conducive to creating a calm, focused and engaged environment that promotes learning. I am happy that I was able to join in the celebrations, and I thank the town of Arlington for its support.

## **Professional Development**

### ***Lesley University Courses Focus on Creating a Trauma Sensitive Learning Environment***

At Arlington Public Schools, we must all work to help every child learn to the best of his or her ability. This is a challenging endeavor, as each child comes into the classroom with different life experiences, some of which may affect their ability to learn. For example, we know that traumatic experiences disrupt neurodevelopment, leaving an imprint that can make it difficult to process and retain information or recognize non-verbal cues. Behavior or social problems may result. If not overcome, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can adversely affect lifelong health and opportunity. ACEs can include emotional, physical or sexual abuse, household challenges such as violence, substance abuse, or mental illness, or emotional or physical neglect.

Unfortunately, Adverse Childhood Experiences are widespread. Data collected in the [CDC-Kaiser ACE study](#) during the late 1990's demonstrated that 2/3 of adults had one or more ACEs in their childhood history, with 20% reporting three or more such experiences. The good news is that with the right social and emotional supports, the effects of these experiences can be overcome. With such high prevalence of ACEs in the population, what can educators do to be sure they are reaching and meeting the needs of every child?

Current research indicates that the answer is to be sure that teachers and staff understand the relationship between trauma and learning, and that they create trauma sensitive environments to benefit all children--not just those with a trauma history. That is why we have been offering graduate level courses from the [Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity](#) to our teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, related service providers and support staff. The Lesley program offers four graduate-level courses, and individuals who complete the full cycle receive a certificate.

Over the last two years, more than 50 faculty and staff members have taken advantage of this opportunity, and we now have at least one person in every school building who has taken *The Impact of Trauma on Learning: An Overview*, which is the first course in the series. This course covers how the brain works, the impact of trauma on learning, and the knowledge necessary to make meaningful changes in classroom environments and teaching methods. Participants are challenged to rethink the way they teach in order to reach all children. Attendees come away energized, excited and eager to become models for their colleagues.

This fall we offered both the first and third courses, and course four is planned for the spring. I am happy to report that we are one of the first districts in the state to have a cohort of individuals trained at this level. I am also delighted to tell you that Guidance and Social Emotional Learning Director Sara Fernandes Burd, an adjunct professor at Lesley, is teaching these courses. We are committed to continue to offer this program, and it is wonderful to have Ms. Burd available to us as an instructor and knowledge expert in this critical area of education.

## ***Mindfulness Class Promotes Educator Well-being and Eases Pressures***

"Not only do teachers have to deeply understand the content, they have to monitor all their students simultaneously and individualize instruction and support to keep them engaged. Teachers have to show students that they care about their well-being....while simultaneously pushing them to stretch themselves to master intellectually demanding academic work."--  
[Supporting the Whole Teacher](#), National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, The Aspen Institute, 2017, pg. 6.

As the above quote suggests, today's teachers have a lot on their plates. The report quoted above also shares the startling fact that "Teaching...is tied with nursing as the most stressful occupation in the United States." It also shares that "...about half of teachers say they felt a great deal of stress every day and report poor sleeping habits, drowsiness during the day, and even depression. Nearly half of teachers leave the profession before their fifth year..." This kind of turnover impacts students and "...has been linked to lower achievement in mathematics and language arts."

We also know that in order to progress academically, students need to learn and practice social and emotional competencies such as the ability to "...cope with stress, recognize and manage one's emotions and understand the feelings and perspectives of others." (*Supporting the Whole Teacher*, pg 2) Teachers who possess these skills themselves are more likely to create the type of environment that engages students in their learning. They also tend to have better relationships with their students, and as Patricia Heindel, co-founder of the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools says in *Supporting the Whole Teacher*, "Students' learn from people they respect and care about. Learning is a social enterprise, and teachers' ability to create that kind of relationship with their students is critical."

Educator self-care is crucial in order to combat teacher burnout and create the safe and supportive classrooms where students can learn. Teachers who have learned social and emotional skills are able to model them for their students. Quoting again from *Supporting the Whole Teacher*, "...it's difficult for adults to help students acquire these skills if adults themselves do not possess them."

To help APS teachers, staff and administrators deal with the pressures of their jobs and learn self-care strategies, Guidance and Social and Emotional Learning Director Sara Fernandes Burd is offering *Mindfulness for Educators* this winter. This is a free, eight-session program that, as Ms. Burd describes, "...will cover the science of mindfulness, the mindfulness of breath, body, emotions, heartfulness, gratitude, interpersonal interactions and everyday mindfulness." The goal is to provide participants with the skills to incorporate mindfulness into a daily life practice. I am grateful to Ms. Burd for recognizing the need to provide this supportive program in our district. This should help all participants better manage stress, improve their sensitivity to the feelings and perspectives of others, and enhance their interactions with students and colleagues.

## **Grants**

### ***Arlington Education Foundation Supports Educators through Continuing Scholar Awards***

Twice a year, the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) (AEF) generously makes [Continuing Scholar Awards](#) to educators that enable them to have learning experiences that they can apply to their work with students. I am pleased to announce the latest of these awards.

- Julie Harrington, Hardy fourth grade teacher, will attend the [Conferring and Small Group Institute in Reading](#) at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City. This program provides structures and methods that can make teaching more responsive and aligned to each member of a small group.
- Jennifer Breneisen, Stratton Social Worker, will attend the [Social Thinking Clinical Training Program](#). [Social Thinking](#) is an organization dedicated to assisting professionals and parents foster the development of social competencies.

I want to thank AEF for their commitment to our district, and to the ongoing development of our teachers and staff.

### ***Arlington Public Schools Receives "State Safe and Supportive Schools Grant"***

We have just been notified that the state has awarded Arlington Public Schools a competitive fiscal year 2017-2018 *Safe and Supportive Schools Grant* for \$19,900. This funding will be used for stipends to support Pre-kindergarten through middle school teachers, administrators and staff members participating in the district *Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative (SASS)*.

This new grant is in addition to the \$100,485 we are receiving from the [Arlington Education Foundation \(AEF\)](#) this year. AEF has committed to providing a total of \$200,000 over the next three years to support SASS. The 2017-2018 AEF award enables us to bring the [Youth Mental Health First Aid \(YMHFA\)](#) program to the district.

We are very fortunate to have such generous grant support in our SASS efforts. Last year, two grants enabled us to assess six critical areas and prepare district and school action plans to create a truly inclusive and supportive Pre-K-12 environment: a \$31,100 competitive [Safe and Supportive Schools Grant](#) from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and a [\\$10,000 Development and Expansion Grant](#) from the Arlington Education Foundation.

We are grateful for all the support we are receiving in our efforts to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social and vocational success in an ever-changing world.

### **Awards & Distinctions**

#### ***Students Deliver Distinguished Performances on National AMC 8 Exam***

As I mentioned in my *News from November*, all Ottoson students who are interested have the opportunity to take the [AMC 8](#), offered by the [Mathematics Association of America \(MAA\)](#). This exam is designed to be difficult, and students have 40 minutes to complete 25 problems. I want to commend each of the 60 students who challenged themselves by taking the exam in November, and we are all very proud of the results. I want to call out the top OMS scorers in each grade and recognize them for their excellent performance.

Student	Grade	OMS Placement
Mikhail Saykin	6	First
Walter Vincent	6	Second
Cameron Connell	7	First
Stuart Joun	7	Second*
Rafi Nelson	7	Second*
Graham Vinson	8	First
Victor Chen	8	Second

\*tied for second

Two of these students had scores within the top 5% in the US: Graham Vinson who had the top score at OMS, and Cameron Connell who had the second highest score at the school. These students each receive an Honor Roll Certificate to mark their achievement.

In addition, fourth grade Thompson student Jiahe Liu took the AMC 8 this year. This is the first time we have had a child of this age request to participate. Since this is a very challenging exam, Jiahe was asked to take a pre-qualification test. After doing very well, he was granted permission to take the exam. Jiahe's AMC 8 score places him among the top six out of all the students who took the test. This remarkable performance earns Jiahe a Certificate of Achievement.

I want to thank Ottoson Math Club co-leader Jonathan McIntyre for spearheading this all-school effort. I also want to thank the parent volunteers who helped get things going quickly, Mathematics Director Matthew Coleman who assisted with timesaving logistics before and after the test, and OMS Mathematics teachers Julie McDaniel and Stephanie Carlson for their support and participation. Congratulations to everyone who took part.

### ***"Empowering Girls" Conference Inspires and Instructs Ottoson Student Representatives***

Twenty eighth grade OMS girls were among the 450 students from 30 middle and high schools across Middlesex County attending the *Sixth Annual Empowering Girls Conference: Women with Vision*. Leadership, self-discovery and setting goals in the face of obstacles were areas of focus for the six distinguished speakers during the two-day event this month. The aim of the Conference, hosted in Lexington by Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan, was to help the young women build confidence and learn to set professional and personal goals.

District Attorney Ryan was particularly interested in allowing time for the attendees to work on expressing their individual visions. It is her belief that such visions lead to meaningful world change, and that it is important for everyone to understand that the way they deal with obstacles can make a big difference in their future. Each day, the students had time to create vision boards that represented the forward path they see for themselves. They also participated in interactive group discussions about the obstacles they may encounter as they move forward with their visions, and how these might be addressed. OMS English teacher Lindsay Hubbard, Science teacher Heather Krepelka and Assistant Principal Maureen Murphy accompanied the young women. All attendees reported that the Conference provided a wonderful learning opportunity, with powerful messages coming from inspiring and dynamic speakers. I want to thank OMS Principal Eileen Woods, the eighth grade teachers who attended and those who made student recommendations for taking the time to support our young women in this valuable experience.

### ***AHS Athletes Named to Fall All-Scholastics Teams***

Every season, *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Herald* review the high school teams in the area and recognize athletes as *All-Scholastics* to honor their academic and sports excellence. I am happy to report that two of our fall competitors received this designation during December. Captain Lloyd Cleary, an AHS senior, was named to the *Boys Soccer Herald Team* and Captain Ryan Oosting, a junior, was named to the *Boys Cross Country Herald Team*. Ryan was also named to *The Boston Globe All-Scholastics Team* for boys cross country.

It is wonderful to see our talented athletes recognized in this manner. Boys soccer and boys cross country had an exciting season, with both teams capturing their first ever Middlesex League titles. I commend both Lloyd and Ryan for the leadership they provided during the successful fall season, and congratulate them on being named to the *All-Scholastics* teams.

### ***Fifteen AHS Students Chosen for MMEA Northeastern District Senior Festival***

Congratulations to the 15 young people who are representing Arlington High School at the Massachusetts [Music Educators Association \(MMEA\) Northeastern District Senior Festival](#) to be held at the Galvin Middle School in Wakefield next month. The Festival concert on January 14 follows two days of intensive six-hour rehearsals led by nationally recognized university conductors.

Hannah Alton, Henri Choi, Joey Dalton, Lindsey Delbanco, Will Davis-Kay, Ben Hoffinger, Ben Horsburgh, Amy Scobbins and Ella Simring will be performing in the Chorus. Liam Barthelmy, Grace Kam, Sarah Kam and Crystal Zhu will be members of the Orchestra, and Amy Cunniff and Charlie Keating will perform in the Band. Our students auditioned along with approximately 1,000 others from public and private high schools in 56 northeastern Massachusetts communities in November. About 40% of these were accepted to participate in the District Festival.

In addition, nine of these students have been recommended to audition for the MMEA All-State Music Festival that takes place in March. They will compete with students from approximately 360 public and private high schools across the state. I know that everyone participating in the district ensembles will have a meaningful experience. We wish those going on to the All-State auditions in January a great experience and much success.



### ***AHS Madrigal Singers Perform at Holy Trinity Armenian Church***

It is always gratifying when members of the wider community invite our young people to share their talents. This month, the AHS Madrigal Singers performed at the holiday concert held annually at the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Boston. In return for the group's performance, the Church made a generous donation to help fund the upcoming spring trip to Italy and Switzerland. I am grateful to the Church for hosting our young people in this beautiful venue and assisting in their fundraising.

### **Creative Highlights**



### ***First Combined Music Technology-Chorale Concert Thrills with Live and Video Performances***

For the last nine years, AHS Music Technology teacher John DiTomaso has overseen the production of hundreds of pieces of original music, arrangements, music videos, soundtracks and live performances produced by Intro and Advanced Music Technology students. These are normally shared in two annual concerts, but this year, he was challenged to consider a new idea. Eleonora Leto, a prior Music Tech student and an AHS Chorale member, suggested that a combined concert be presented. Mr. DiTomaso had been wanting to give his students the opportunity to write better melodies, and to find a way to expand the audience for their work. Considering Eleonora's idea, he realized his students could learn concepts of melody, harmony, creating a music score and arranging much sooner if they studied writing music for voice in the first quarter of the year.

After talking with Chorale Director Madalyn Kitchen and Instrumental Director Sabato D'Agostino, the idea blossomed into two additional concerts on the AHS performance schedule. The first of these, a combined Music Technology/Chorale concert, was held in November and the second, a combined concert with the instrumental groups, is planned for April 11. Music Technology concerts are an authentic, real-world learning experience produced by the students working in teams: sound crew, stage crew, lighting, video, programs, and promotion. Crystal Zhu, who studies Music and Sound for Film, and Nate Pokress, an introductory student, created the beautiful flyers you see at the beginning of this article. Students in all levels of Music Technology are involved in the concerts.

I want to share two examples of work presented at the concert that will give you a taste of the amazing work that is being done by these young people. Vocalist [Ben Horsburgh performed Elysium](#) by the group Bear's Den alone on stage accompanied by sixty tracks of his vocals while video images of his face appeared behind him projected on a black curtain and moving in sync with the music. Mr. DiTomaso believes that Ben's vocal arrangement and sound mixing was stunning and reports that his flawless performance brought chills to the audience

Also performed live were two excellent pieces by Advanced Music Technology student and drummer Julian Carpenter: *Coda/In the End*, a four-part harmony vocal jazz piece and *When I Go Out*, an up-tempo jazz-informed number. You will want to look at the wonderful [video](#) of the second piece that beautifully illustrates the process of how the students collaborate and create their work in the classroom.

The AHS Chorale presented one of Mr. DiTomaso's personal favorites when they began their set with *Hide and Seek* by Imogen Heap. This song was originally composed for a solo voice harmonized through a piece of technology called a [vocoder](#). Containing a lot of tightly-voiced dissonance, the piece is very difficult in terms of harmony, and Mr. DiTomaso reports that the result was truly beautiful.

The combined concert was an impressive showcase of the work being done by the talented musicians learning to produce their own music in our [Music Technology](#) program. Each video and live performance was special, unique and powerful. I congratulate all the participants, and look forward to the next concert, *Sonic Voyages IX*, on January 18.

### ***Middle and High School Musicians and Vocalists Shine in Winter Concerts***

We all look forward to the winter concerts delivered by our talented young musicians and vocalists every December. I am featuring two of these in this month's newsletter.

The Ottoson Instrumental Ensembles Winter Concert was held on December 13. Five groups took part: the 6th Grade String Orchestra, Chamber String Orchestra and 7th and 8th Grade String Orchestra led by Instrumental teacher Jing-Huey Wei and the Concert Band and Jazz Ensemble directed by Instrumental teacher Paula Demetrio. Each group performed two or three memorable numbers, with selections that ranged from classical to contemporary. Examples include Rimsky-Korsakov's *Dance of the Tumblers from Snow Maiden*, jazz standard *Stella by Starlight*, the *March from Carmen* by Bizet and Randall Standridge's *Afterburn* that captures the emotions of flight in a jet plane. Over 200 musicians were involved in this wonderful concert.

The Arlington High School Winter Concert followed on December 15. The Concert Band, Honors Orchestra and Jazz Band, led by Instrumental Director Sabato D'Agostino, and the Madrigal Singers and Arlington Chorale, led by Choral Director Madalyn Kitchen, were on hand to present a beautiful evening of music. It was very special to see individual artists showcased throughout the program, including Owen Kulinski who conducted the Concert Band on their first piece, and Liam Barthelmy who conducted the work he composed for the Honors Orchestra. Solo vocalists and instrumentalists included Joey Dalton, Sam Harris, Ellen Tucci, Savannah Curro, Sam Dieringer, Carolyn Dressler and Charlotte Bell. Mr. D'Agostino demonstrated his bass skills when he and percussionist Julian Carpenter joined the Madrigals on *Like Someone in Love* by Burke and Van Heusen. The AHS Concert came to a rousing end with a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, sung in German. This glorious piece, presented by the

Symphony Orchestra and Arlington Chorale, featured four solo vocalists: Henri Choi, Will Davis-Kay, Olivia Carpenter and Neeraja Deshpande.

I want to thank Ms. Wei, Ms. Demetrio, Mr. D'Agostino and Ms. Kitchen as well as the amazing young performers for bringing us such beautiful music. It is gratifying to see the enthusiasm that our young people display, and to see how their talent develops as they continue in our music program.