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News from September-October 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members,

I wish a warm welcome to all readers of the first Superintendent's Newsletter of the 2020-2021 school year. We have shared together the start of a new and unusual educational reality. I want to share with you a bit about how this year is progressing. This school year, while different than usual, still has many items of note.

I am happy to welcome new and old teachers, students, staff, and administrators to the district, and I want to take advantage of this opportunity to introduce the two new principals that have joined us.

Andrew B. Ahmadi has taken over the reins at Peirce, replacing Karen Hartley who retired. Mr. Ahmadi comes to us after serving as the Assistant Principal at the Whittemore Elementary School in Waltham. His educational background includes master's degrees in School Leadership from Harvard University and Childhood Education from Hunter College.

Fabienne Pierre-Maxwell is the new Principal at Gibbs, replacing Kristin De Francisco who is now the Assistant Superintendent at Groton-Dunstable Public Schools. Mme. Pierre-Maxwell comes to Gibbs with over 15 years of professional experience, including interim principal, principal, and assistant principal positions. Her educational background includes a Law/J.D. degree from Western New England College of Law and the completion of Project LEAD, a District-based Licensure Administration Program in Springfield. I want to thank Principals Hartley and DeFrancisco for their prior leadership of Peirce and Gibbs, and welcome Mr. Ahmadi and Mme. Pierre-Maxwell to the district.

While there are many things that are different about this school year, I am happy to note that there are also many things that have stayed the same, although they may be happening in a different way. Let me give you just a few examples.

- School pictures are being taken.
- The grades 3-8 instrumental music program is still going strong. Roughly over 600 students in nine schools are taking string or band instrument lessons remotely this year.
- The AHS National Honor Society is again offering free tutoring by juniors and seniors.
- AHS cross country, field hockey, and soccer teams are competing.
- Middle school and high school clubs are meeting.
- High school elections for class officers and student council were held.
- Virtual Back to School Night, Open Houses, and Curriculum Nights have occurred, will be soon taking place, or are being planned at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

We are seeing a lot of creativity and flexibility throughout the district. Here are just a few examples from the elementary level that will give you a taste of how our schools are adapting and thriving this year.

- Outdoor spaces are being used for snacks, lunches, learning activities, and teaching and reading.
- Teachers can schedule a time for Dallin Principal Thad Dingman to read to their classes.
- Peirce Principal Andrew Ahmadi reports that he is seeing students engage in academic conversations online, using breakout rooms that teachers "walk-through" to promote topics linked to the lesson objective.

- Math mornings that introduce interesting mathematical topics beyond what is being taught in class are underway from 7:30-8:10 am for Brackett students.

I am proud of the way our students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families are stepping up to find new ways of teaching and learning while staying safe. While there have been a few times that a class or Learning Community has had to go fully remote for two weeks due to positive COVID tests, I am happy to report that there has been no evidence of community spread within our schools. As you read the articles below, you will see that we are continuing our focus on social emotional learning, antiracism, and equity and inclusion professional development for our teachers, staff, and administrators.

I hope this introduction gives you a sense of all the amazing things going on in our schools this year. I know you will enjoy learning more in the following articles.

Best regards,

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools

Headline View

District News

School Opens with Two Learning Models for Grades Pre-school-8, Remote 9-12

In this most unusual year, we welcomed back about 70% of our students to participate in a hybrid model that combines in-person and remote learning and about 30% of students to a fully Remote Academy. [Learn more>](#)

Arlington High School Building Project on Schedule and On Budget

The AHS rebuild began as scheduled, and new estimates enabled just over \$1M of items that had been removed to be added back as the project nears the end of the Design Development phase. [Read more>](#)

Safe & Supportive Schools

District Focus on Social Emotional Learning Continues

An additional resource created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)) helped us consider the social emotional impacts to our students as we planned new learning environments for this school year, and schools have focused on activities to combat bullying during October and will address kindness in November. [Read more>](#)

AHS Antiracism Working Group Strives to Create a More Inclusive, Antiracist Community

The newly formed AHS Antiracism Working Group (AWG), dedicated to "...create change to center BIPOC voices and support BIPOC in our community", has already completed several notable accomplishments towards "...achieving demands outlined by the BSU and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion at AHS." [Learn more>](#)

Artist Cedric Douglas Addresses Social Injustice, Connects Communities Through Art

A discussion with public and street artist and designer Cedric "Vise 1" Douglas helped students understand how to use artwork as a way to engage people in the public space, deliver deep social messages to a wider audience, and let their voices be heard. [Read more>](#)

AHS Students Come Together to Create Artful Response to Racial Inequities, Inequalities

Sponsored by the Creating an Everyday Culture Subcommittee of the AHS Antiracism Working Group, students have come together as a collective to create a beautiful and powerful mural that will help to remove barriers, address structural racism, and create equity through visibility and representation. [Learn more>](#)

Professional Development

Summer Professional Development Focuses on Upcoming Year, Continues Inclusion Work

This summer's professional development included the four-week Harvard School of Education course [Developing Strategies for Online Teaching and Learning](#) and nine days of learning and planning that featured how to improve equity and inclusion, training on digital tools, handling the new health and safety requirements, and curriculum and planning. [Learn more>](#)

Grants

New Grants Sustain and Expand Safe & Supportive Schools Initiative

Two Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education competitive grants and the final funding from the [Arlington Education Foundation's](#) Safe and Supportive Schools (SASS) Initiative will assist in implementing our SASS action plans and provide for COVID behavioral health needs screening. [Learn more>](#)

Creative Highlights

Shared Artworks Convey Messages of Love and Unity Between Arlington and India

During the spring and summer, hundreds of Arlington Public School visual art students exchanged artworks with students at [Ramana's Garden](#), a home for children on the banks of the holy Ganges River in India.. [Read more>](#)

Call for Artists Goes Out for 2020-2021 Youth Banner Project

The [2020-2021 Youth Banner Project](#) is now underway, and Arlington students in grades 6-12 are invited to submit artworks for consideration as banners that will fly in the town center next spring. [Learn more>](#)

Continue to read the full News from September-October 2020

District News

School Opens with Two Learning Models for Grades Pre-school-8, Remote 9-12

During the school reopening planning process, seven Guiding Values were identified.

- "Health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff, and families above all else."
- "Equity will remain at the core of our work as we design learning programs for students."
- "We will support student and staff social-emotional well-being, acknowledging that the school experience will be very different when compared to previous years."
- "We will consider the strengths and limitations of returning to school for all stakeholders: students, families, staff and community, and build-in continued flexibilities."
- "We will need to be flexible and fluid in how we deliver instruction to ensure that we address student learning in age-appropriate ways."
- "Ensure that plans are sustainable and take into account the mental, physical, social, and emotional needs of the school community."
- "We recognize the continued investment needed in professional development to support our staff in creating engaging, high-quality digital learning environments."

As the work progressed, it became clear that the best way to achieve these values was to offer two options for our Kindergarten through eighth grade students: hybrid learning which combined two days of in-person education with three days of remote, and a five-day Remote Academy. Due to issues surrounding heating, ventilation, and air conditioning at AHS, it was determined that the high school needed to begin with remote learning only.

It was determined that our Menotomy preschool students would be split between those attending in-person five days per week and those attending remotely five days per week. It is important to note that

certain student groups have been prioritized for in-person instruction and have been invited to attend school four days per week. This is true for all grades and schools and is based on guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Opening school with multiple models enables the district to put safety first and still establish positive and supportive learning environments. During the spring closure, we learned a lot about navigating remote learning and how to engage our young people. We noted what worked and what did not in the remote environment and gathered feedback from families, teachers, students, and staff. As described in the Professional Development section of this newsletter, 54 staff members attended the Harvard online course [*Developing Strategies for Online Teaching and Learning*](#).

We recognize that there is no equivalent substitute for in-school learning. But we believe that having hybrid and remote options are the best ways to open schools and tackle the safety and educational challenges of this most unusual school year. I want to thank all the administrators, teachers, and staff members who have devoted significant time to planning and executing these models. I also thank our district's families for the support they are providing. Making the adjustments we have all had to make has been difficult, but by working together, 2020-2021 will be a meaningful and successful school year.

1.0 Hybrid Learning Model Combines In-person and Remote Learning

Approximately 70% of our Kindergarten through eighth grade students are participating in the hybrid learning model. Each class is divided into two cohorts. Cohort A attends school on Monday and Tuesday for in-person lessons. Cohort B receives these lessons on Thursday and Friday. Both academic and special subjects (art, music, FACS, physical education) are scheduled during the in-person days. All students and staff are required to wear masks inside the building. This is supplemented by frequent hand-washing, one way hallways, and social distancing of at least six feet in classrooms and during lunch. Outside space is utilized when conditions permit, and the cafeteria and gym spaces are available for breaks and other purposes throughout the day. All children can receive both a healthy breakfast and lunch at school every day at no cost through December 31.

There are two remote learning days for each cohort, and both groups join the teacher remotely on Wednesday. There is no face-time with the teacher on fully remote days. Students complete assignments and work from materials prepared by the teacher which may be delivered via recordings/video, slides, or written content. Technology and tools are utilized both for classroom instruction and curriculum enrichment. The Wednesday schedule is a combination of both synchronous (with the teacher) and asynchronous learning. Special area subjects take place during the remote part of the hybrid schedule. Most students across the district are able to participate in morning meeting or an advisory session.

2.0 Remote Academy Supports Those Who Choose or Need to Attend School at Home

Approximately 30% of preschool through eighth grade students, and at this time, the majority of high school students, are learning remotely five days/week this year. A mix of synchronous and asynchronous study is offered in the Remote Academy. The amount of time dedicated to guided independent and recorded content varies by age and ability. Schedules include five hours of learning time consisting of both academic subjects and specials. Each elementary day begins with a welcome from the teacher followed by Morning Meeting and ends with a closing meeting. Gibbs students begin their day with Advisory and OMS students begin with ASPIRE.

At Arlington High School, students are meeting remotely in 4 x 80-minute class blocks per day. Each class is a semester long, and students may register for 6-7 classes for the year. Each high school student's schedule includes an Advisory period on Wednesdays. Attendance is centralized and tracked in real-time, and this month Principal Matthew Janger reports that attendance is running at 99%--a figure he is very pleased with!

The first semester remote plan for Arlington High School includes opportunities for all students to have contact with teachers and staff on the campus through a variety of means and a robust system of follow-up with all students, especially those who do not submit assignments on time or struggle with remote learning. When classes meet in person at least once per quarter it is called a “reverse field trip”. Teachers offer in-person meetings by appointment for up to one hour per week.

Clubs remain an important part of the AHS experience, and recruitment was done at a Virtual Club Day. As of mid-October, 50% of clubs have held meetings, 18% met in person, and 50% had plans for an in-person meeting. This fall the Athletic program has offered Boys and Girls Cross Country, Boys and Girls Soccer, Field Hockey, and Golf, and 342 students made the final team rosters. There are plans to continue the decade-long tradition of Wellness activities during December. Dr. Janger indicated this month that he has been “...receiving a lot of emails thanking the teachers and school for making remote instruction effective and engaging.”

Additionally, I am happy to share the news that we have three excellent educators serving as co-administrators of the elementary Remote Academy this year. Samantha Karustis, Assistant Principal of Dallin, and Eva Liner, Assistant Principal of Bishop, are providing valuable oversight and support to the elementary teachers and families involved in the program. Maureen Murphy has accepted this role for grades 6-8. Their duties include:

- Collaborating with teachers to support instruction
- Communicating with students and parents
- Observing and evaluating instruction
- Providing professional development opportunities for teachers
- Ensuring that teachers and students have the resources they need to support quality teaching and learning.
- Working to maintain communication and a relationship between teachers working in the hybrid and Remote by Choice Academy

Arlington High School Building Project on Schedule and On Budget

I am happy to report that the AHS rebuild began as scheduled and that the project is nearing the end of the Design Development phase. A new estimate done this summer revealed that the project was running under budget. This enabled the team to add back just over \$1M of items that had been removed. Once all aspects of the interior and exterior are finalized, the construction documents will be sent out to bid.

It is very exciting to know that the foundations for the Performing Arts and STEAM wings have been poured and that their construction will begin shortly. You might be wondering whether the schedule could have been accelerated since the majority of students are not attending classes in the existing building. That has been investigated but is not possible. The following graphic shows the current timeline.

	Site Work Begins April 2020	Construction Begins Oct. 2020	February 2022	September 2023	Building Complete August 2024	Site Complete April 2025
	Phase 1 Enabling (6 months)	Phase 1 (15 Months)	Phase 2 (18 Months)	Phase 3 (12 months)	Phase 4 (9 months)	
CONSTRUCT	Site preparation, relocate utilities	Performing Arts & STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math) Wings	Spine, lobby, cafeteria, media ctr., humanities wing, preschool, district admin	Gymnasium wing	Site work completed	
STUDENTS	Remain in existing facility	Remain in existing facility	Move into new Performing Arts & STEAM wings, remain in part of existing facility	Move into new school (all except Gymnasium wing), still use Red Gym	Move into completed school	
COMPLETED			Performing Arts & STEAM wings completed	Humanities wing, lobby, preschool, district admin, cafeteria, library completed	New school complete	

Total Project Duration: 5 years
 Note: Schedule is subject to change

Updated 9/1/20

Additional project information and a short video that illustrates the progress made thus far can be found on the [AHS Building Project website](#). Click [here](#) to learn more about the sustainability features in the new high school. You may sign up for Construction Updates, the bi-monthly Bulletin, or email the AHS Building Project Committee on this [webpage](#). You will also want to view the monthly progress videos that can be found [here](#).

Safe & Supportive Schools

District Focus on Social Emotional Learning Continues

Those of you who have followed my newsletters over the last several years know that the district is committed to creating safe and supportive schools where every child can achieve academic, emotional, social, and vocational success in an ever-changing world. Social emotional learning is key to achieving this goal. The following line taken from the [APS Social Emotional Learning website](#) sums this up simply and succinctly: “The social and emotional environments of the classroom and school have a profound impact on students’ ability and willingness to learn.

The pandemic and the new learning environments that we have created present many challenges to the health and well-being of our students. We were very fortunate to have had an additional resource available to us as we considered our reopening plans. [Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning Roadmap for Reopening School](#), was released by [CASEL](#), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, on July 9. More than 40 partners collaborated with the CASEL team to create this document, including Arlington Public Schools Social Emotional Learning and School Counseling Director Sara Burd who was asked to be one of the writers. Thank you, Ms. Burd, for contributing to this important document that has been a great help as we prepared to welcome our students back.

October is [National Bullying Prevention Month](#), and other years have seen our young people actively engaged in events and reflection around bullying, cyberbullying, cruelty, hatred, racism, homophobia, and LGBTQ+ discrimination. It wasn’t possible to hold the kinds of activities we have in the past, but an example of what could be done comes from the Ottoson. Monday October 13th was [Blue Shirt Day](#), and Thursday, October 15 was designated as [Spirit Day](#) to address LGBTQ+ bullying. Students, whether at home or attending classes at the school, were encouraged to wear blue on the Monday and purple on the

Thursday. This created a visible display of solidarity, standing up against bullying and with LGBTQ+ youth that circled the globe.

This is a good time to remind you about the district [webpage](#) that lists a variety of available resources around safety and security. Topics addressed include Bullying & Cyber Bullying, Internet Safety, LGBTQ+ Support, and Mental Health & Counseling Services, among others. You will also want to take a look at the [APS Social Emotional Learning website](#) mentioned previously to learn more about social emotional learning and its impact as well as the [Mental Health and Well-Being Website](#) that provide supports while navigating learning in the time of COVID.

Lastly, as we head into November, we invite all members of our community to join in practicing 30 Days of Kindness! Practice kindness towards yourself, towards your loved ones and towards members of your community & the world. The SEL Website contains daily prompts, journal pages, a socially shareable image, as well as [a link to watch a daily video](#) related to each day's challenge. We invite you to share in these activities with your students of all ages as we model our own social emotional learning skills.

AHS Antiracism Working Group Strives to Create a More Inclusive, Antiracist Community

We as an Antiracism Working Group aim to create change to center BIPOC voices and support BIPOC in our community. We are a group of students, staff, and administrators communicating and collaborating to implement effective everyday antiracist policies at Arlington High School. The AWG is committed to achieving demands outlined by the BSU and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion at AHS.

The statements above describe the mission of the newly-formed and student-driven AHS Antiracism Working Group (AWG) that is dedicated to "...discuss and act on ways to combat racism in our school." Back in June after the murder of George Floyd, the AHS Black Student Union held a rally and presented a list of 20 points for action. With the support of Principal Matthew Janger, seniors Maia Patel-Masini and Noah Sweder co-founded the AWG as the organization to accept those points and take them forward. They continue to lead the group in this important work.

Five subcommittees have been created to address different elements of racism at Arlington High School.

- Resources for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)
- Staff Diversity/Hiring Staff of Color
- Curriculum Changes
- Staff Training
- Creating an Everyday Antiracist Culture at AHS

These subcommittees meet virtually about once per week. The larger group, about 85 members strong, meets monthly. Those who cannot make the meetings can catch up by reading the Google Classroom notes. Since the group started working in June and continued their work over the summer, a lot has already been accomplished.

- A confidential and anonymous report form that students can use to report acts of micro-aggression and racism has been created.
- A mentorship and internship program for BIPOC students is well underway.
- The History and English departments have made immediate changes to their curricula to add learnings about more diverse voices in class with more in-depth discussions.
- A presence on Instagram (@AHS_AWG) has been created where there will be videos like their monthly newsletter, along with a website that houses a written form of the newsletter and resources and hotlines.
- The group maintains contact with the Arlington Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and Human Rights Committee.
- A discussion with artist Cedric Douglas who addresses racial tensions and representation in our greater community has been held and a mural series is underway in collaboration with the Visual Arts Department.

Raising awareness is one of the important goals of AWG, and when asked what the community should remember, Maia had this to say: “Make sure you are checking what you are doing for your community and on an interpersonal level. Are you making antiracist choices in your mind? Always think about that. We can be better people if we keep this in the forefront as we interact with others.”

Maia also said that the AWG is always looking for ideas of things that the AHS community would like to see happening within the school of the district. She invites us to reach out to her at mpatel-masini2021@spyponders.com, or to Noah at nsweder2021@spyponders.com or to faculty advisor Andrea Razi at arazi@arlington.k12.ma.us. For more information on the Cedric Douglas conversation, ***Artist Cedric Douglas Addresses Social Injustice, Connects Communities Through Art*** in this section. Please see ***AHS Students Come Together to Create Artful Response to Racial Inequities, Inequalities*** also in this section for more information on the mural series.



Artist Cedric Douglas Addresses Social Injustice, Connects Communities Through Art

On October 27, AHS students, teachers, and community members had the opportunity to join public and street artist and designer Cedric “Vise1” Douglas for a ZOOM conversation that explored how he uses his art to address social injustice and promote community engagement. The discussion was organized by AHS Visual Art teacher Nikki McCulloch as part of her involvement with the AHS Anti-racism Working Group (AWG). Ms. McCulloch heads the group’s Creating an Everyday Antiracist Culture at AHS subcommittee. The group’s primary focus is the creation and publication of the AWG newsletter to educate and support BIPOC students and community members and create safe spaces for all students and their identities. The subcommittee is also working on a mural series and hosting artists that address racial tensions and representation in our greater community. Forty-one participants were present at the Douglas event.

Mr. Douglas’ studies at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design inspired him to use his artwork as a way to engage people in the public space and to deliver deep social messages to a wider audience. This led him to create The Up Truck, a mobile art lab that has engaged over 3000 Boston residents in 12 communities. He is recognized for his large-scale murals and portraits, which he considers *social realism*. Mr. Douglas has been an artist-in-residence at Emerson College and Northwestern University, where he created a beautiful mural which he describes in a [video](#) as showing his inner process that “... began as a young kid picking up a can of spray paint...” and results in the creation of a world from his imagination.

Mr. Douglas spent the first 30 minutes of the session presenting his artwork which addresses community, representation, and voice. Six student panelists, all of whom had worked with Ms. McCulloch in an online course dealing with art and activism, were dedicated to crafting the resulting conversation. Some of the topics discussed include how students can use the creative process to express anger or hurt, or when they see something going on in their community that they want to speak up about. Even a simple protest sign on a piece of cardboard is art and expression. Mr. Douglas also talked about the value of giving back to communities and strangers and making art accessible to communities that don’t have the opportunity to use it in this way.

A collaboration with other artists in Haiti was an example of how art can be created art to speak for the people. The mural the group completed was powerful because it spoke to the country's strength in a time of crisis. Mr. Douglas believed it helped the community to be seen and recognized and created a conversation about the duality of their strength and their struggle.

Other work he described included crafting a caution tape for protestors to use in peaceful protest that has been distributed and used across the country. The tape includes words like "I can't breathe", and "Don't shoot". Mr. Douglas crafted "mortuary tags" to honor all the men killed by police gun violence and attached them to roses. He and his mother then distributed them to strangers in a street performance/funeral procession.

Viewers were invited to ask question during the session. Examples include: Where does your street name come from? How do I get involved in my community? What is your favorite medium/piece? Given everything that's going on now, how can we make effective change through art? What process do you use to create a mural?

Ms. McCulloch describes the session with Mr. Douglas as "...awesome and powerful" and I thank her for organizing the discussion. This event is a wonderful example of the work being done by the AWG subcommittee to educate our student body and community on de-centering whiteness and leading anti-racist lives. See ***AHS Antiracism Working Group Strives to Create a More Inclusive, Antiracist Community*** in this section to learn more about the AWG. To learn more about the mural series, see ***AHS Students Come Together to Create Artful Response to Racial Inequities, Inequalities***, also in this section.



AHS Students Come Together to Create Artful Response to Racial Inequities, Inequalities

One of the projects undertaken by the Creating an Everyday Culture Subcommittee of the AHS Antiracism Working Group (AWG) is to create a visual and public art response to racial inequities and inequalities. Members of different AHS organizations and communities that include the Student Council and Black Student Union (BSU) have come together in this effort and are currently creating a wonderful mural. It features an AHS alum who was one of the main speakers at the BSU rally held in June.

The students believe that this mural, which will be exhibited internally, will help to remove barriers, address structural racism, and create equity through visibility and representation. Public art that illustrates the diverse populations within our community creates space for reflection on what it means to be antiracist. It uplifts silenced voices and makes them visible, helping to create empathy and understanding. The mural series is part of the group's effort to create a school environment where all students feel comfortable, validated, and valued.

This project is a beautiful and powerful way for our students to come together as a collective to illustrate support for our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. I thank all the groups who are involved in creating this mural and thank the AWG members and AHS Visual Art teacher Nikki McCulloch for spearheading this effort.

Professional Development

Summer Professional Development Focuses on Upcoming Year, Continues Inclusion Work

Every summer our teachers and staff devote time to professional development—building and/or strengthening skills, developing and/or learning new curriculum, broadening horizons, exploring issues of equity and anti-racism, and planning together for the upcoming school year. During the spring of 2020, the district had to quickly alter how we addressed the education of our young people. We entered this summer knowing that the upcoming year would be like no other, and that we would be operating in a new realm. We knew that we would have to learn many new things in order to be successful. At the same time, we knew that we needed to continue work we started several years ago to build more equal and readdress these concerns.

1.0 Improving Online Instruction Recognized as Key to 2020-2021 School Year

On June 25, the district received the [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). We created the three plans that were requested: in-person learning with the new safety requirements, a hybrid learning model which alternates students between in-person and remote learning, and a full remote learning program. As we worked on upgrading ventilation and creating safe classrooms, it became clear that we would enter the new year with a hybrid model for those students who were comfortable with spending some time in the classroom and a full remote learning program for those that were not.

Since all students would be taught remotely for at least part of the time, we knew that our ability to develop and deliver online instruction needed to evolve from what had been implemented in the spring and that professional development was required to do this. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Roderick MacNeal Jr. applied for and received a [Development and Expansion Grant](#) from the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) that enabled us to offer the four-week Harvard School of Education course [Developing Strategies for Online Teaching and Learning](#). The 54 staff members who participated in the course from July 27-August 23 included curriculum department heads, principals, and classroom teachers from all schools.

The 4-week asynchronous virtual course focused on exposing participants to articles and videos produced by researchers in the field of blended and online learning. The topics included effective pedagogy, scheduling, culturally responsive teaching strategies, social and emotional learning strategies, online tools, and ways to assess students online.

In addition to the articles and videos, participants in the course were put into study groups which consisted of educators from around the world. Each week, participants were asked to respond to each other, and a prompt created by their discussion group facilitator. At the end of the course, each participant who completed the final assignment of developing a remote instructional plan received a certificate to document the 20 hours of learning needed to complete the course.

The content learned in the course has assisted both elementary and secondary summer study groups with developing guidelines that teachers can use as a resource for developing their online lessons. Both elementary and secondary study groups will continue to meet throughout the year to share best practice and identify the challenges and successes that they experience while teaching in the program to which they have been assigned.

This year all of our students will have at least some asynchronous content as part of their learning environment. This course played an important role in getting our educators ready to deliver high quality education remotely. I want to thank the Arlington Education Foundation for making this learning possible.

2.0 Three Sessions Devoted to Building Equity and Inclusion

The learning continued in September as we welcomed our teachers and staff back for nine days of professional development and planning. We continued our work on equity and inclusion during this time. This is ongoing work for our district, most recently addressed last November when an entire day was devoted to the topic. At that time, attendees viewed a video that presented a clear picture of how our students identify themselves and of the problems they face due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, body size and shape, and ethnic and economic backgrounds, This was followed by an expert keynote address and workshops.

This year three sessions were presented. The first two, *Reflecting Upon Equity in our Schools-Identify, Parts 1 and 2*, helped the attendees work through several essential questions.

- What factors shape our identity? Which do you choose for yourself? What parts are determined by someone else/society?
- How does my identity impact the way I see myself and others? What is the difference between how I see myself and how others see me?
- To what extent does who we are shape the choices available to us and the choices we make?
- How does my identity affect the choices I make as an education professional? How does my identity impact the way I teach and the connections I make with students?

METCO Director Margaret Credle Thomas facilitated the sessions directed to preschool and elementary teachers and staff and K-12 Social Studies Director Denny Conklin facilitated those for middle and high school. They were structured to include both group presentations and breakout discussions that enabled thoughtful dialogue.

Building-specific sessions to consider identity within each environment were held on the third day. At Dallin, for example, attendees were asked to choose one of six passages to read, consider, and discuss in break-out groups. These passages covered topics that included *Helping Students of Color Meet High Standards*, *Making Race Relevant in an all-White Classroom*, and *Knowing Students as Individuals*, among others. Each reader was asked to deeply explore the text in light of their own values and intentions, and answer questions around assumptions, agreement, and aspiration or action.

At Gibbs, the time was used to kick-off a middle school-wide project that is being spearheaded by Principal Pierre-Maxwell. Educators from Gibbs and Ottoson will help the faculty and staff explore the state of the culture and identity at each school. The goal of the work that will be done over the next three years is to develop a shared middle school identity to disrupt racism and change the environments in each location to addresses the social emotional needs of all students equitably. Professional development, the introduction of culturally and historically accurate curriculum in all subjects and creating groups and clubs to support marginalized students are key elements of the plan to create welcoming schools where everyone's identity is celebrated.

3.0 Additional Learning Focuses on Technology, Curriculum, and Planning

The other September professional development sessions were designed to make sure that our teachers and staff were ready to tackle the additional challenges that 2020-2021 presents. Each building held sessions that prepared everyone to handle the new health and safety requirements that are necessary to keep onsite students and staff safe, set goals, and consider topics specific to each location. Digital professional development was prominent as our students and staff are using more online tools this year such as [Seesaw](#), [Screencastify](#), and [Pear Deck](#). Time was also provided to consider strategies to keep elementary, middle, and high school students engaged during remote learning.

Time was provided for preschool and elementary teachers to concentrate on curriculum by department—science, literacy, social studies, mathematics, and social emotional learning. Administrators and teachers were able to share the adaptations to curricula and plans that were created over the summer to facilitate both hybrid and remote learning. Specialists in visual arts, physical education and wellness, performing arts, and FACS gathered to review their curricula and explore the new software tools they would be using. Special education, English language learning, school counseling, and METCO were also addressed.

I want to thank Assistant Superintendent Dr. MacNeal for spearheading the creation of this summer's rich professional development and all the teachers and staff members who lent their support. The commitment to success during these unusual times was evident among attendees, and I am glad that we were able to offer the necessary background and training to get the year off to a good start.

Grants

New Grants Sustain and Expand Safe & Supportive Schools Initiative, Support Screening

I am delighted to share the news that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has awarded our district two grants that enable us to continue and sustain our work to ensure that our schools are safe, welcoming, and supportive of all our students. One is a \$7,500 [Safe and Supportive Schools Continuation Grant](#). The initial Safe and Supportive grant was awarded in the 2016-2017 school year. This enabled our schools to complete a survey of existing conditions and create initial action plans to improve the climate and the learning experience for all. Annual continuation grants have been awarded since then.

The second grant is a one year \$72,500 competitive grant for [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness](#). It focuses on screening students for behavioral health needs in the wake of COVID. The district will hire part-time behavioral health and outreach staff to conduct the screening and connect families to the appropriate health supports. Additionally, the grant provides a contract to facilitate quality mental health referrals to all town residents through [INTERFACE](#), a Mental Health referral network started by William James College.

The district will be using a COVID-specific screening tool developed by UCLA in grades 3-12 this fall and again in the spring. All students who are identified with moderate to severe responses will receive personal follow-up by a member of their school's mental health team or their personal counselor or social worker. They will be offered supplemental behavioral health support in the form of a small group, short term, brief school-based intervention. Those with a greater level of need will also be offered a referral to [Arlington Youth Counseling Center](#) or INTERFACE or collaboration with their existing mental health providers. Information about this program is being sent to parents by the school principals in advance of the screening, and in-person and remote students will complete the short (10-15 minutes) screening during class time. This is an expansion of the mental health screening pilot we conducted with secondary students last year.

We are also grateful to the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) (AEF) that has awarded \$56,500 to the district to support the ongoing work of Safe and Supportive Schools. This is the third and final funding from AEF's total pledge of \$200,000 to this effort. At this time the district will benefit from consultation, training, and support with Dr. Greg Benner of the University of Alabama and the [Whole Child Initiative](#) to create deep and sustainable awareness of and support for social-emotional learning and youth health and wellbeing throughout our district and community.

Creative Highlights

Shared Artworks to Convey Messages of Love and Unity Between Arlington and India

A very special cross-global collaboration took place this spring and summer. Hundreds of Arlington Public School visual art students were asked to share their work with the young people of [Ramana's Garden](#), a home for children on the banks of the holy Ganges River in India. Visual Art Director David Ardito reports that the Indian students conveyed messages of love and unity through their artwork and our students responded in kind. The theme for the artwork was *Planting Seeds Together*.

I want to thank the APS Visual Art teachers who participated and Town of Arlington Director of GIS/Systems Analyst Adam Kurowski for his help in coordinating this wonderful art collaboration. Thank you also to the young artists who took part.

Call for Artists Goes Out for 2020-2021 Youth Banner Project

I am happy to share the news that beautiful banners designed by Arlington students will fly in our town again this year. The [2020-2021 Youth Banner Project](#) is now underway, and students have been invited to submit creative and thoughtful artwork under the theme of *Protest: Lifting Voices*. This is a way for our young artists to consider the things that matter to them, what they want to protect and speak out about, and to use their artistic “voice” for change. Social, environmental, and economic justice, and protection of our earth and its creatures are all possible topics to explore.

A jury will select 20 artworks that will be enlarged to banner size and hung outdoors along Mass Ave in Arlington Center in the early spring of 2021. The jury will also select three students to each receive a \$200 scholarship prize. A new element has been added to the initiative this year in the form of a *People’s Choice Award*. Votes will be tallied, and the results announced at the spring reception.

The contest is open to any Arlington student in grades 6-12. Information on how and what to submit can be found on the [Call for Artists webpage](#) of the [Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture](#). The Commission sponsors the Project in collaboration with the APS Visual Art Department. Funding is generously provided by the Gracie James Foundation. Copy and paste this URL https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jboLvGjaTIKYaMgwjFkOriUcA_UBN8Zr?usp=sharing into your browser to see winning entries from 2017-2018 that were created under the theme *Compassionate Community*. I hope many of our students will take advantage of this opportunity to let their voices be heard in Arlington.