

AEA Secondary Budget Priorities 2020

Thank you all for the opportunity to share with you this evening.

This year has been difficult in many ways, but one of the best things to come from it is that we are finally close to appropriately staffed. By hiring additional teachers, particularly in special education, our class sizes and caseloads have been brought down to a level that is much more manageable. We want to advocate retaining the extra positions added this year, such as the learning communities at Gibbs and OMS, and particularly the special education additions in grades 6-8.

One area that still needs additional staffing is counseling. The pandemic has increased need for social/emotional outreach and mental health counseling in our schools. Our counselors are already stretched thin. Additional counselors and social workers for students not on IEPs would enable them to more quickly respond to student needs, and allow time in their schedules for teaching coping skills preventatively before problems arise.

Our Special Educators have been working above and beyond this year, with increased required documentation, increased communication with families, supporting students in a new way, and, at the high school, being the only teachers in the building each day with students. Teachers in our special education programs are responsible for providing services, teaching classes, and managing a caseload, but some of them have to do the extra work of running their programs. This work includes scheduling students and BSPs, and handling the communication about the programs. We are requesting an additional stipend for these program leader positions, to reflect the extra work some of them are assigned.

In addition, we strongly believe that the school committee needs to plan for salary increases for all educators. Our staff have been working overtime for the past year without additional compensation. The shift to remote and hybrid teaching meant a complete redesign of curriculum from preK to 12, with almost no time in which to do that work. The increase in communication with students and families working remotely has taken additional hours every day. Many of our staff are putting their lives on the line each day to come into the buildings during a time of unprecedented community spread of a deadly disease. But beyond the pandemic, Arlington continues to lose highly qualified staff to neighboring districts that offer higher salaries. We don't want to be the training ground for great teachers in other districts, and that means offering competitive compensation.