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News from January 2021

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members,

This January has been a month of unprecedented events. As we continued to struggle with the effects of the pandemic, we witnessed an act of civil unrest. Free speech and the right to protest are fundamental values we all share. Violent situations, however, evoke fear and trauma. I am proud of the way our teachers and staff responded and made use of resources that helped them address student concerns. You can read more about this in ***K-12 Social Studies Director Addresses Teaching about the Capitol Riot in WSJ Article*** in the **Awards & Distinctions** section of this newsletter.

Arlington Public Schools is a vibrant and diverse community, and we are dedicated to making our classrooms safe and supportive places for all of our students to learn and engage in civil discourse. We are committed to providing an equitable education for all and will continue to focus on inclusion and antiracist teaching practices. As educators, we are dedicated to impacting the direction the future takes.

Coming together is one way we deal with challenging times, and it is gratifying to see how many ways our schools are finding to build community and stay connected. Here are just a few examples.

- Dallin Visual Art teacher Stacie Greenland is asking for parent Art Helpers to make art along with her classes, contribute, and share perspectives with the students, or share their own art ideas by teaching as a Guest Artist.
- Hardy PTO is using a community-led approach to solving immediate problems by creating a Mutual Aid network so that everyone can get the help they need during these difficult times.
- The AHS Student Council Communication Committee announced Meme Mondays, and students are invited to send in an original meme for posting every Monday throughout the year, culminating in a community vote to choose the best one.
- The AHS Interact and Do Something Clubs are teaming with [Tree-Plenish](#) to plant 225 live trees throughout the community.
- Our METCO team connected with our Boston students in late December by personally delivering small bags of holiday goodies to everyone.
- All APS staff members were invited to share in optional Zoom self-care and collective care sessions January 19-22 that included Movement, Music, and Mindfulness, Making and Meaning, and Cultivating Gratitude.
- We can't be there in person, but we can still cheer-on our athletes by taking advantage of the varsity basketball and hockey games livestreamed at youtube.com/acmisports or on the Education Channel, RCN 613, Comcast 9, and Verizon 24. Click [here](#) and then choose the sport you are interested in to see the game schedules.

The Arlington High School Building Project Committee has released a new [Construction Progress Video](#). Work continues on the steel frames of the first two wings, Performing Arts and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) which are expected to be complete in February. In anticipation of the new hybrid schedule that begins at AHS next month, the Committee has created a [Student Quick Guide](#) that addresses frequently asked questions about the construction site when students are on campus. You can keep up-to-date on the project at the Arlington High School Building Project [website](#).

I am pleased to report that Arlington High School was the site of a regional COVID-19 vaccination clinic this month. We were the lead site serving first responders and school nurses in Arlington, Belmont, Lexington, and Watertown. The clinic was coordinated by Arlington's Health and Human Services Director Christine Bongiorno and supported by the Information Technology Department who brought in three hotspots so that internet issues didn't impact their abilities to work with patients. Expansion of the town's ability to vaccinate is expected as we move into Phases 1 and 2. Please see [Regional First Responder Vaccination Clinic Update](#) for more information.

I want to send my best wishes to town and school Chief Technology Officer David Good on his retirement at the end of this month. Mr. Good has been instrumental in moving our schools forward in information technology as we built new buildings and upgraded the infrastructure in existing ones. His efforts have been invaluable this year as we took on the challenges of remote learning, and we are grateful for the support his team has provided to our families. We look forward to his continued assistance on special projects, including the rebuilding of Arlington High School. Thank you and good luck, Mr. Good.

I hope you will take some time to review the wonderful things that are happening in our schools in the newsletter below. Our teachers, staff, students, and families are all working hard to make this difficult year as meaningful as possible. I know you will enjoy learning more.

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools

Headline View

Safe & Supportive Schools

Middle School Students Observe No Name Calling and The Great Kindness Challenge

This month was the time for Ottoson and Gibbs students to think about anti-bullying and spreading kindness as they observed [No Name Calling Week](#) and [The Great Kindness Challenge](#). Read more>

Student Resource Packet Addresses Issues of Discrimination in School

The new [Student Resource Packet](#) sponsored by the [Arlington Human Rights Commission](#) is an important tool for middle school students to expand their knowledge around different forms of discrimination, particularly those that might be encountered in school. Learn more>

Ottoson Calls for Artists to Explore Identity and Community in "This is Who We Are"

All OMS students have been encouraged to submit painting, writing, graphic arts, or film that illustrate the personal qualities that they contribute to their family, town, school, and wider community to become part of a moveable art exhibit. Learn more>

AHS Antiracism Working Group Continues Diversity Mural Project with Call to Artists

Thanks to a grant from the AHS Inclusion & Diversity Committee, the *Embracing Differences* project has issued a *Call to Artists* to submit original artwork for consideration as murals that will be displayed throughout the school. Read more>

Implementation of Collaborative Problem Solving Continues at Arlington High School

New staff is being trained and the leadership team continues to work with coaches from [Think:Kids](#) as the implementation of [Collaborative Problem Solving®](#), an evidence-based, positive approach to help young people with behavioral challenges, continues at AHS. Learn more>

District News

Green Teams Across the District Keep Up the Good Work

From collecting over 10,000 pounds of pumpkins to learning about ecosystem maintenance and sustainability, encouraging residents to opt up to 100% renewable energy, removing invasive plants,

cleaning up litter, learning about stormwater pollution prevention and more, our school Green Teams take on projects that promote awareness and address environmental issues and climate change. [Read more>](#)

Professional Development

Peirce Building Meeting Explores the Transgender Experience

Last month a panel hosted by consultant and author [Jeff Perrotti](#) presented personal narratives that enabled the attendees to come away with an increased awareness of the ways life is not easy for a transgender child, continuing the Peirce community's efforts to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. [Learn more>](#)

Nine Visual Art Teachers Attend 2021 Teaching for Behavior Institute

This month nine more art teachers were able to take advantage of the 2019 [Arlington Education Foundation](#) grant that supports the professional development required to implement [Teaching for Artistic Behavior](#) (TAB), a strategy that is being implemented in all our schools. [Read more>](#)

Grants

AEF Grants Support Conversations on Diversity and Enhancement of Classroom Experiences

The [Development and Expansion Grant](#) from the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) (AEF) will support the Arlington Reads Together program that encourages reflections on diversity, and the three [Innovations in Education Grants](#) fund an author/illustrator visit, the purchase of five Wacom drawing tablets for mathematics teaching, and a 21st century laser cutter for digital fabrication in middle school engineering/technology classes. [Learn more>](#)

Awards & Distinctions

K-12 Social Studies Director Addresses Teaching about the Capitol Riot in WSJ Article

Denny Conklin, K-12 Social Studies Director, is one of the educators interviewed by *Wall Street Journal* reporters this month on how teachers across the country addressed the January 6 Capitol riot in the classroom. [Learn more>](#)

Student Artwork Needed to Compliment Arlington Philharmonic Family Concert

A traditional Haudensaunee story is the inspiration for an original piece of music to be performed by the Arlington Philharmonic Orchestra and students in grades K-5 are invited to create artwork for virtual display at the concert in March. [Read more>](#)

Over 100 Student Designs Under Consideration in 2020-2021 Youth Banner Project

The response from Ottoson Middle School and Arlington High School to the 2020-2021 Youth Banner Project was strong, and the jury will soon choose 20 designs to be enlarged to banner-size and hung outdoors along Mass Ave in Arlington Center this spring. [Read more>](#)

Academics & Enrichment

Annual APS Mock Caldecott Challenges Students to Think Critically about Book Illustrations

After evaluating the illustrations in ten beautiful picture books, our students gave their first place vote to [We Are Water Protectors](#), matching the [Caldecott Medal](#) winner for the first time since the Mock Caldecott began. [Learn more>](#)

"Ottoson Insider" Publishes First Issue and Staff Meets with Photojournalist

The impressive OMS newspaper, *Ottoson Insider*, is now online and the young reporters took time to learn more about their craft by meeting virtually with photojournalist Peter Southwick this month, gaining insight on how best to use photos to enhance their stories. [Learn more>](#)

25 people, leaving a note on a friend's desk, or saying good morning to 15 people. Others required a little more time such as a video chat with a grandparent or esteemed elder, painting a rock and leaving it somewhere to surprise someone, or stepping up for someone in need.

At Gibbs, the emphasis was on The Great Kindness Challenge although a few No Name Calling Week activities were included during a single week of observance. Things got started with a video and discussion around the definition of kindness. Everyone received the GKC checklist and all were encouraged to think of one word related to kindness to be placed into a word cloud like the one you see above this article. On day three students were reminded to be kind to themselves and take a breather. Gratitude and its relationship to kindness was then addressed and the week ended with the challenge to think of one act of kindness that could be done consistently from that day forward.

No Name Calling Week and The Great Kindness Challenge are powerful and positive bullying prevention initiatives that can lead to more kindness, unity, and respect at school and beyond. I want to thank those who spearheaded the events at their school--School Counselors Ron Colosi and Emily Vincent and Special Education teacher Jenn Mungovan at Gibbs, the OMS Queer Straight Alliance and advisers Nanci Siegel (School Counselor) and Noreen Mitchell (Mathematics teacher) at Ottoson--and everyone else who supported these activities.

Student Resource Packet Addresses Issues of Discrimination in School

Our middle school students have an important new tool to "...reinforce and expand... understanding of the different forms of discrimination, especially those that may be experienced in an educational setting." At the request of Ottoson Principal Brian Meringer, the [Arlington Human Rights Commission](#) created a resource document that addresses "...six categories of discrimination: racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, islamophobia, discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ (including homophobia), and hate speech."

Two AHS student interns researched and completed the detailed document with the hope that the information will assist young people who face these issues. It is also hoped that students who use common slurs will be able to understand the harm that these can cause. The [Student Resource Packet](#) includes exercises, texts, and videos to define and explain each category. I thank Mr. Meringer for requesting this important resource, the Arlington Human Rights Commission for taking up the project, and the AHS students for creating it.

Ottoson Calls for Artists to Explore Identity and Community in "This is Who We Are"

The Ottoson Visual Art Department has announced *This is Who We Are*, a themed art challenge that asks students to tap their creativity and celebrate who they are in terms of goals, ideas, talents, and passions. The young people are encouraged to use painting, writing, graphic arts, or film to illustrate the personal qualities that they contribute to their family, town, school, and wider community. Interpretation of the challenge is up to each individual, and [prompts](#) have been created that may provide inspiration. Entries are being accepted through M 12 and Visual Art teachers Polly Ford and Kayla McKenna encourage students to take part.

All submissions that follow the [project guidelines](#) will be shared on the website and social media. Individual pieces will be chosen for special recognition and displayed on banners and digital reproductions around the school, some remaining for future OMS students to enjoy.

The Gibbs/Ottoson Diversity and Inclusion Group has joined the Visual Art Department in sponsoring this project, and it is supported by the Ottoson Media Center and [ACMi](#). Funding is provided thanks to an [Innovations in Education Grant](#) from the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) awarded in May 2020. I thank AEF for their funding, and Ms. Ford and Ms. McKenna for their leadership of this moveable art project that explores issues of identity and community.

AHS Antiracism Working Group Continues Diversity Mural Project with Call to Artists

In my [News from September-October 2021](#) newsletter I reported on how the [AHS Antiracism Working Group](#) (AWG) had joined with the Black Student Union to create a visual and public art response to racial inequities and inequalities by creating a mural for display at the high school. I am pleased to let you know that AHS Visual Art teacher Nikki McCulloch has just issued a *Call to Artists* to submit mural designs based on the theme *Embracing Differences* so that the work can continue.

Ms. McCulloch has this to say about the project: “Artists possess a powerful tool to evoke social change. Without uttering a single word, they can enlighten, educate, and affect change around the world. *Embracing Our Differences* invites you to participate in creating a school culture where diversity, equity, and inclusion are embraced, and individuality is celebrated.” She invites interested students to submit original art to a juried panel that will select a series of designs to become murals to be hung throughout the high school. The goal is to choose designs that will help create the environment that all members of the AHS community want to be part of.

The mural project is being funded through a grant managed by the AHS Inclusion and Diversity Committee (I&D), a student group founded in fall 2019. Representatives come from many AHS groups that share a focus on creating a more equitable school. These include the Student Council, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Young Feminists Alliance, Best Buddies, and the Black Student Union. The initial money for the grant was a gift from the AHS Class of 2018. The administration matched it one-to-one, making it a generous sum to be put towards inclusion, diversity, and equity programming. Applicants must demonstrate how their project will contribute to these values in the school and town community. The mural project was a perfect fit and many on the I&D see how clearly this initiative will help make AHS a more inclusive and safe space.

Submissions of a digital image of original art with a description about the idea, how it applies to the theme, and a title are due by February 28. A panel of students and faculty will vote on the winning designs. You may contact Ms. McCulloch at nmcculloch@arlington.k12.ma.us for more information. I thank her for spearheading this effort and thank the I&D Committee for awarding the funding.

Implementation of Collaborative Problem Solving Continues at Arlington High School

In my [News from January 2020](#) newsletter I reported on the implementation of an evidence-based approach to help young people with behavioral challenges at Arlington High School. [Collaborative Problem Solving®](#) (CPS) is a positive approach to discipline that starts with the idea that children will do well if they CAN, not just if they want to. CPS calls for adults and children to work together to solve problems realistically and to the satisfaction of all. It focuses not on the behavior, but on the situation(s) that a child is having trouble with, leading to an identification of which skill deficits are contributing to the behavior. Solutions are jointly determined and a plan for enactment is created. This approach has been shown to reduce challenging behavior, build skills and confidence, solve the problem, and build lasting relationships.

I am happy to report that the implementation of this approach is continuing. A CPS leadership team of administrators, counselors, social workers, and teachers meets twice a month with a coach from [Think:Kids](#) of the Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry. Teachers are invited to access the coaches or work with the leadership team on challenging situations. New AHS staff have had at least Introductory training, and all will be Tier 1 trained by the end of their first year. The plan is to continue to build out the leadership team and develop in-house training capacity over the next two years.

By engaging with students, hearing their perspectives, and building skills, CPS helps us to assist our most vulnerable and marginalized students. It is a strong, child-centered, positive way to address behavioral problems that can inhibit a child’s ability to learn and is an important component in our mission to serve every child. I am glad that we continue to implement this important approach that proactively solves problems in a lasting manner.

District News



Green Teams Across the District Keep Up the Good Work

It was another great year for pumpkin collection as all elementary schools participated to rescue over 10,000 pounds of pumpkins for composting! Our lunchroom composting partner [Black Earth Compost](#) came to get them, and they will be processed for use at local farms and garden centers. This is the fourth annual Great Pumpkin Rescue.

Our elementary Green Teams have been getting together for a variety of activities. The Stratton Green Team organized a fifth grade garden bulb planting activity in the fall. Recently they have been collecting broken, unusable string lights to learn more about reuse. Those that can be fixed will become part of a virtual fixit clinic where families can learn how to repair and reuse broken items in their homes. Those that are not fixable will go to electronic waste recycling. Additionally, this group is planning a tour at Mass Audubon's [Habitat Education Center & Wildlife Sanctuary](#) in February where they will learn about their ecosystem maintenance and protection practices.

The Hardy Green Team organized a community event to encourage residents to opt up to 100% renewable through the [Arlington Community Electricity](#) program. They are also planning an upcoming online workshop about stormwater pollution prevention with the [Mystic River Watershed Association](#). Across town, the Peirce group had their first outside meeting for third, fourth, and fifth grade students this month.

Education and raising awareness are important activities for our green activists. Gibbs Green Team students organized a middle-school virtual watch party of *I am Greta* over winter break. The documentary was well-attended by Gibbs and Ottoson students. The Ottoson team and Art Club are collaborating on a project to create educational signs for posting around town. These original artworks will include fun facts that promote recycling and waste reduction.

The middle and high school Green Teams have hosted a number of outdoor, COVID-safe activities that allow for social distancing this fall and winter. Gibbs and Ottoson teams came together to remove invasive plants along Spy Pond. and to take a guided tour of the climate resilience features of Wellington Park led by a town engineer. The Gibbs and Arlington High School teams were joined by Bishop students for a litter clean-up along the Mystic River, and the AHS SAVE and Sustainability Clubs organized multiple litter clean-ups.

The secondary school students have been meeting online weekly and have been busy building team websites, preparing and delivering classroom presentations on climate change, promoting residential composting, advocating for continued composting and recycling at their schools, and messaging legislators about climate action. They are also earning community service hours by organizing volunteering at the Arlington [Recycling Center](#) to assist with e-waste and plastic bag recycling.

It is inspiring to see our young people take on projects that address environmental issues and climate change. I thank all of the students who come together to work on these issues, the adults who lead the

groups at our schools, and our School Sustainability Coordinator Rachel Oliveri who spearheads and supports their work.

Professional Development

Peirce Building Meeting Explores the Transgender Experience

Last month, Peirce administrators, teachers, and staff hosted consultant and author [Jeff Perrotti](#) for a building meeting that featured personal narratives about the transgender experience. Mr. Perrotti is the founding director of the [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's \(DESE\) Safe Schools Program for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Students](#), an initiative that offers free training and professional development on topics related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and schools.

The guest speakers at the session included the mother of a transgender student, a transgender college student, and members of the Arlington community who were able to present personal narratives about the transgender experience. The participants shared their stories for about 45 minutes, and then the attendees went to break-out groups to discuss how they can better support transgender students. The topics examined include the use of pronouns, how to build skills in this area, and next steps. A list of LGBTQ+ friendly books was also shared.

The group came away from the meeting with an increased awareness of the ways in which life is not easy for a transgender child, even in a supportive community and family. This session was a continuation of efforts at Peirce to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. Last February teachers and staff attended a professional development training offered by the [Greater Boston PFLAG](#) organization. This spurred the creation of the Peirce School Rainbow Alliance, a safe space for LGBTQ+ and ally students and their families to make connections, learn about LGBTQ+ topics and perspectives, and participate in inclusive activities. Virtual family read-alouds, hosted by the Alliance and held once a month, is one such activity.

Principal Andrew Ahmadi had this to say about the recent session led by Mr. Perrotti: "The session was helpful for our school community, in particular, because it was in the context of our developing school improvement plan and Peirce's goal to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students."

Additional training is being considered for the spring. Arlington Public Schools is committed to ensuring that our schools are safe, welcoming, and supportive of all our students. Sessions such as this one contribute to the creation of school improvement plans and improved teaching practices that support this goal.

Nine Visual Art Teachers Attend 2021 Teaching for Behavior Institute

I am pleased that nine Visual Art teachers were able to attend the virtual 2021 Teaching for Behavior (TAB) Institute this month. During the two-day sessions, attendees worked with national TAB experts and fellow TAB teachers from across the country to share their experiences and curricula, as well as successes and challenges.

This group is part of a total of 14 teachers who are taking advantage of the benefits offered through a \$10,000 [Development and Expansion Grant](#) that supports the professional development required to implement [Teaching for Artistic Behavior \(TAB\)](#) in all our schools. The [Arlington Education Foundation \(AEF\)](#) grant was awarded in 2019 and enables our educators to explore the TAB teaching strategy as well as Social and Emotional Artistic Learning (SEAL) curricula. In prior years, several of our Visual Art teachers have taken part in the SEAL retreats offered by [The Inspired Classroom](#).

TAB is a nationally recognized choice-based art teaching strategy that empowers teachers to help their students become confident and expressive art makers, independent thinkers, and learners. TAB creator and arts educator Katherine Douglas reports that the strategy effectively convinces many student artists

that they can set their own problems to solve, make their own decisions about what kind of art they need to create, and know when to work collaboratively with fellow artists. Additionally, since students are encouraged to express their own feelings, personal ideas, and concerns, this approach increases students' appreciation for individual differences.

I thank AEF for providing the grant that makes TAB and SEAL professional development possible for our Visual Art teachers. These approaches to teaching and learning enable our educators to create nurturing and thoughtful communities of young artists who are excited about their work.

Grants

AEF Grants Support Conversations on Diversity and Enhancement of Classroom Experiences

Once again, the [Arlington Education Foundation](#) (AEF) has generously awarded grants to our district. The first is a \$7,500 [Development and Expansion Grant](#) that supports two conversations with [Dr. Beverly Tatum](#), author of [Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?](#) The book has been chosen for this year's Arlington Reads Together, an 18-year project that strives to connect people through sharing experiences, strengthening bonds within the town, exploring ideas to break down preconceptions or stereotypes, and giving people the opportunity to explore one topic together. Thanks to the grant, Dr. Tatum will speak to the community virtually on Sunday, March 21, and with Arlington Public School staff the following day. Reading the book and taking part in Dr. Tatum's presentations will encourage everyone to reflect on diversity issues that include race, religion, immigration, population transition, changing socio-economics, and cultural competence.

Three [Innovations in Education Grants](#) were also awarded.

- *Bryan Collier Virtual Author/Illustrator Visit* will bring this award-winning illustrator to Peirce where he will deliver two 55-minute presentations centering on art and expression, storytelling techniques, and bookmaking.
- *Connecting with Mathematical Learners in the Digital Age* funds the purchase of five [Wacom](#) drawing tablets for Gibbs that allows freedom of movement across the electronic workspace, enabling teachers to sketch directly, draw diagrams, and make annotations when solving mathematical problems, improving communications and transcription of ideas and thoughts.
- *Advanced Manufacturing in Middle School Technology/Engineering* funds the purchase of a [Glowforge](#) laser cutter to be used in engineering/technology classes taken by seventh and eighth grade students, meeting the standards for the eighth grade manufacturing unit and allowing students to incorporate digital fabrication, a rapidly growing 21st-century skill, into their creative and engineering design processes.

I thank AEF for supporting our teachers and staff as they strive to improve their teaching practices and offer meaningful new experiences to their students.

Awards & Distinctions

K-12 Social Studies Director Addresses Teaching about the Capitol Riot in WSJ Article

Our district was no different from many across the country as we evaluated the best way to address the Capitol riots with our students. As reported in *Capitol Riot Becomes Civics Lessons in Schools*, *Wall Street Journal*, Yoree Koh and Jennifer Calfas, January 18, 2021, APS K-12 Social Studies Director Denny Conklin and his colleagues devoted significant time "pulling together tips and lesson plans..." and "academic resources for an unconventional Inauguration Day..." The goal was to make sure our teachers had what they needed to work with students to examine "...the connection between power, privilege, and race, as well as on social media and the limits of freedom..."

The following reflections from Mr. Conklin are also from the article: "In history and social studies, we tend to think about wanting to reflect upon both sides and have historical empathy," Mr. Conklin said. "In this case, this isn't an opportunity where we want to try to justify the actions of these people."

It is gratifying when journalists reach out to our district to learn more about our approaches to teaching and learning, and I am glad that Mr. Conklin was given the opportunity to share how Arlington Public Schools addressed the controversial and important topic of what happened in the Capitol on January 6. During these challenging times, it is vital that we speak with our young people about civic engagement and responsibility. I thank Mr. Conklin and his team for responding quickly and thoughtfully so that meaningful discussions could be held in our classrooms.

Student Artwork Needed to Compliment Arlington Philharmonic Family Concert

A very special display of student artwork will be connected to the virtual [Arlington Philharmonic Orchestra](#) family concert on March 15, and our young people are invited to take part. Former AHS Performing Arts Director and composer Pasquale Tassone has written a piece of music for the concert that tells the traditional Haudenosaunee (people of the longhouse) story of [How the Bear Lost its Tail](#). Local illustrator Abby Cali has received a grant to create illustrations for the piece, and Arlington students in grades K-5 are invited to do the same. The students will use the artist studio habit of mind called ENVISION, which is imagining new artworks and the steps to bring them to life.

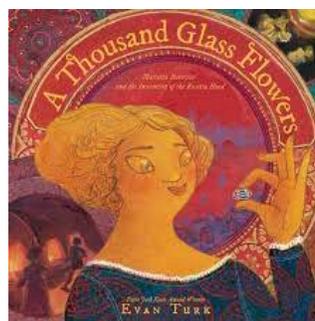
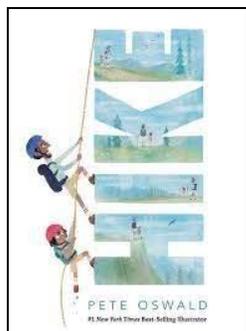
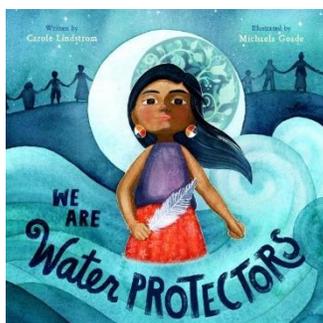
Those students wishing to take part should create their illustration and submit a jpeg file to either their elementary art teacher or Dallin Visual Art teacher Stacie Greenland at sgreenland@arlington.k12.ma.us by February 26. The title of the file should include the student's first name, last initial, and grade. Students in grades three through five may also attend an optional Zoom meeting with Ms. Cali on February 16. At this session, Ms. Cali will share information about her work and how to draw the story's characters of bear and fox along with a few tips for drawing winter landscapes. Space is limited. Please use this [link](#) to reserve a space. This is a wonderful intersection of art, traditional storytelling, and music and I hope many of our young artists will take part.

Over 100 Student Designs Under Consideration in 2020-2021 Youth Banner Project

The response to the [2020-2021 Youth Banner Project](#) proves that the creative juices are flowing among our students. Over 100 Ottoson Middle School and Arlington High School students have submitted designs for consideration to be enlarged to banner-size and hung outdoors along Mass Ave in Arlington Center in the early spring of 2021. Twenty artworks will soon be chosen by jury. Three students will also be selected to receive a \$200 scholarship prize. New this year is a *People's Choice Award*, which will be announced at a spring reception.

The young people are responding to the theme of *Protest: Lifting Voices*, and we can expect to see designs that tackle social, environmental, economic justice, and protection of our earth and its creatures. Students are encouraged to create artwork about what matters to them the most, as they use their *voice* for change. The project is sponsored by the [Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture](#) and done in collaboration with the Arlington Public Schools Visual Art Department. Funding is provided by the Gracie James Foundation.

Academics & Enrichment



Annual APS Mock Caldecott Challenges Students to Think Critically about Book Illustrations

The Mock Caldecott, our version of the [Caldecott Medal](#) awards that began in 2014, is a very special annual project. Every year our library staff works in cooperation with Robbins Children's Librarian Pam Watts to choose ten picture books that contain exceptional illustrations—the kinds that the award is designed to acknowledge. Just like those chosen by the [Association for Library Service to Children](#), all books nominated in our contest must be published by an American publisher during the previous year and feature an illustrator who is a citizen or resident of the United States. After reviewing the books in-depth with their library professionals, the students vote to choose their favorites.

Like so many traditions at APS, the Mock Caldecott had to be done a little differently this year. During January, the students who had Library as their Q2 special class discussed the Caldecott Medal and looked through this year's books. They watched videos about each of the ten illustrators and considered each one, looking for illustrations that are unique, surprising, and innovative. Students were encouraged to think deeply about how each book was created.

But our staff didn't want to limit voting to only those students who had library Q2. So, they created a wonderful [document](#) that included a picture of each book and links to video read-alouds and picture walks. There were also links to interviews with the illustrator for those who wanted a more in-depth look. Once the students had gone through the materials, they could connect to a Google form and vote. Classroom teachers were encouraged to share the document with their students, and it was hoped that the young people might even involve their families during the asynchronous at-home school time, or after school.

This year's beautiful book selections are:

1. [We Are Water Protectors](#), illustrator Michaela Goade
2. [In the City](#), author-illustrator Chris Raschka
3. [All Because You Matter](#), illustrator Bryan Collier
4. [If You Come to Earth](#), author-illustrator Sophie Blackall
5. [Black is a Rainbow Color](#), illustrator Ekoa Holmes
6. [The Little Mermaid](#), author-illustrator Jerry Pinkney
7. [Julian at the Wedding](#), author-illustrator Jessica Love
8. [Hike](#), author-illustrator Pete Oswald
9. [The Next President](#), illustrator Adam Rex
10. [A Thousand Glass Flowers](#), author-illustrator Evan Turk

After tallying the 1,116 votes received, the top choice at 192 votes was *We Are Water Protectors*. *Hike* was right behind at 189 votes and *A Thousand Glass Flowers* came in third at 140. These results indicate that for the very first time, our first choice is the same book that won the Caldecott Medal for 2021! The publisher describes the book this way: "Inspired by the many indigenous-led movements across North America, this bold and lyrical picture book issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguarding the Earth's water from harm and corruption." Voters this year included K-5 students and selected middle school students.

I want to thank Ms. Watts and our Library staff members who worked so hard to make this year's Mock Caldecott a success: Alison Vaishnaw at Bishop, Justine Bloch at Bishop and Hardy, Danielle Jensen at Hardy, Nancy Alfonso at Brackett, Rebecca Aaronson at Dallin, Renae Nichols at Peirce, Chrissie Collins at Stratton, Doreen Cameron at Stratton, Jamie Webster at Thompson, Nicole Doliner at Gibbs, Edith Moissand at Ottoson, Elementary Professional Librarian Jennifer Lauchlan, and AHS Library and K-12 Library Coordinator Stacy Kitsis.

"Ottoson Insider" Publishes First Issue and Staff Meets with Photojournalist

In the [News from November-December 2020](#) newsletter, I reported on the OMS student-run newspaper that was in process. I am happy to be able to share the [link](#) to the group's first issue, and I encourage you

to take a look. I want to congratulate the team for creating a very impressive newspaper and I know that all of us will want to follow your work throughout the school year. Kudos to all!

The enthusiastic *Insider* staff had the opportunity to learn more about their craft when photojournalist Peter Southwick joined them for a weekly Zoom meeting this month. Mr. Southwick, an Arlington resident and father of two AHS alumni, had a remarkable career that included being a staff photographer at the Associated Press, Director of Photography at *The Boston Globe*, and a Professor of Journalism and Director of the Photojournalism Program at Boston University.

Between answering students' questions about the most interesting people he's met and places he has been, Mr. Southwick urged the newspaper team to think about their own reporting and how they could best use photos to enhance their newspaper. He not only spoke about his time covering Nelson Mandela and pro baseball, but he helped one of the students come up with a photo subject for an article about state climate legislation. Mr. Southwick stressed the importance of connecting with the *people* behind the stories—not just the topic.

OMS Science teacher and *Ottoson Insider* adviser Alexander Burgun-Tower says that Mr. Southwick provided a lot of insight and inspiration to the young reporters and offered continued guidance to the team if they have future questions. I am pleased that the students had the opportunity to virtually meet with Mr. Southwick. The *Ottoson Insider* is off to a great start!

Creative Highlights



AHS Performing Arts Students Deliver One-Act Plays and Winter Concert

Our Performing Arts Department is working hard to make sure our actors, directors musicians, vocalists, and composers have opportunities to share their talents with us. Two wonderful events were offered virtually this month. Two student-directed one-act plays were presented on January 12-14, and both were great fun. A French restaurant is the setting for *La Mouche* by Stephen Bittrich, a comical take on the old cliché of a customer finding a fly in the soup. AHS juniors Sierra Farrington and Paige Goodsell directed the three actors who expertly parried back and forth about how to address this dilemma. Jonathan Rand's *Crazytown*, directed by juniors Sophie Garrity-Janger and Clara Webster, transported the audience to a location that has among other strange practices, outlawed being nice. Both were a delight to watch and I congratulate the directors and actors who took part.

The second event was the Virtual Winter Concert, presented on January 29. While it was unfortunate that we couldn't be in the auditorium to see the performances in person, the virtual format allowed for a more varied program that showcased the talents of individuals as well as ensembles. The instrumental offerings included solo performances, duets, a trio, a string quartet, and larger groups that included members of the Jazz Band, Honors Orchestra, Concert Band, and Orchestra. The AHS choral groups including the Madrigal Singers, Chorus, and Chorale all offered beautiful songs of hope and love that were perfect for the times. Music Technology performances were interspersed throughout the concert and these featured engrossing video set to what was often original music. The audience was also treated to a barbershop quartet! Kudos to everyone who participated.

I want to commend all our performing arts students who worked so hard to bring these performances to us. Auditioning and rehearsing virtually, delivering a livestreamed play, recording at home, putting all the individual pieces together—all of this takes tremendous effort. I want to thank AHS Drama teacher Michael Byrne, Instrumental Director Sabatino D'Agostino, Choral Director Mara Walker, and Music Technology teacher John Ditomaso for making sure that our young people can continue performing and being appreciated by their community. If you missed the Winter Concert, you may watch it [here](#).