

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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TO: Andover School Committee Members
FROM: Sheldon H. Berman, Ed.D., Superintendent
SUBJECT: Reflection on the 2018-19 School Year
DATE: June 26, 2019

I want to thank the members of the School Committee for your support this past year. About three and a half years ago, while I was still an interim superintendent, you asked me to stay on and move the district forward. Recognizing that meaningful change takes time, you gave me a four-year contract to bring about that progress. Looking back, the district has achieved extraordinary results over those years, and the 2018-19 school year continued building on the important strides we've made.

Over this period of time, we have reduced average elementary class size so students could have more personal attention and support throughout that critical period of childhood development. We will continue to reduce elementary class size next year, particularly in kindergarten.

We've moved forcefully and effectively to address the needs of students with dyslexia and other reading challenges through a comprehensive approach to early screening, progress monitoring, program improvements and effective interventions so that our programs and services now rival even the best of the special education schools. Our programs provide the opportunity for our students to remain with their neighborhood peers and benefit from a rigorous curriculum that will serve them well in education beyond high school.

To make our literacy effort even more comprehensive, we have provided the materials and professional development to give our students the richest of experiences that represent not only their diversity in reading abilities, but their cultural, national, and racial diversity. The results are already apparent in improved reading achievement for third through fifth graders and particularly for students with disabilities.

At the same time, we have moved to foster more supportive learning environments through consistent social-emotional learning programs across all grades in the district. As a result, students feel safer, more supported, and more connected to school and to others in their school.

We made a smooth and effective transition to a new high school schedule, which can be one of the most controversial and difficult changes any school district tackles. In the survey results you heard about two meetings ago, students, teachers and parents expressed that the new schedule better supports student-teacher relationships, reduces academic stress, and has a positive impact on student progress.

We addressed challenges in our math program through the creation of an accelerated math program at the middle school, as well as a summer school math program to enable more students to move into the accelerated program. We also provided additional support for students at the high school through the AVID program.

The mission of the Andover Public Schools, in partnership with the entire Andover community, is to educate by engaging and inspiring students to develop as self-reliant, responsible citizens who are thinkers, problem solvers, and contributors prepared to participate in an evolving global society.

We, in Andover, are gifted with an incredibly talented and dedicated teaching staff. We have continually and strategically advanced the capability of our staff through high-quality professional development and professional leadership opportunities.

We reached out to our parents and community with more regular communications through Warrior Wednesdays, our weekly newsletter, and ACCESS-ABILITY, our quarterly magazine for parents of students with special needs.

Faced with the problem of ailing and inadequate facilities, we not only developed a long-term facility plan but have placed the prospect of a new West Elementary and a renovated high school within the community's reach. We also developed a strong agenda of future capital improvements that will enhance the learning environment at all our schools.

We created a textbook fund to support the consistent replacement of textbooks and instructional materials so that our students have current and appropriate materials and we don't have to compete with capital improvements for dollars to fund textbooks. Plus, we developed a more transparent and credible budget process that has secured the confidence of the Finance Committee.

Andover is becoming recognized as a leader statewide and nationally. We have created a unique culture of innovation that supports authentic learning through our capstone programs, our maker spaces, our high school's innovation lab and IDEASudio, and through our efforts at personalized learning and universal design for learning.

At the same time, we have set the stage for even more growth and development over the coming years through the lengthening of the school day next year, the consideration of start times to address the health needs of our adolescents, the restructuring of the middle school schedule, and the elimination of tuition for full-day kindergarten, which is on the horizon.

We have accomplished a lot in four short years. I also recognize that leadership has its challenges. No leader is free from mistakes or missteps and I acknowledge that I have made my share over the past four years. However, we have remained positive, kept our eye on what is best for students, and continued to make progress.

There is always room for improvement, such as making our website content more comprehensive and easier to use, enhancing the use of data to assess the progress of our initiatives, and further expand communication efforts. As our Communications Director moves into her second year in this new role, together we will identify strategies to strengthen communication with all in the APS community. These areas will be the focus of our work over the summer and coming year.

I'm very proud of the service I've been able to offer to Andover. I'm proud of the teachers, administrators and staff who have accepted the challenges as their own and willingly took on each challenge knowing that they were making a difference for children. I'm very proud of the School Committee for your bold vision and support of that vision on behalf of our students. I appreciate the time, energy, and talent you dedicate to the district and the thoughtfulness behind your input and feedback. You understand that Andover is already a high-performing district; yet you also know that we can be even better and you are willing to support that improvement. And I'm proud of this community for the support people have offered the schools through ACE, Andona, the PTOs and PACs, and so many corporate and organizational partnerships.

I want to thank the members of the School Committee for the thoughtfulness you put into this evaluation process, as well as for your acknowledgements and recommendations. The evaluation is beneficial not only as a reflection on the past year, but as a map for the path forward. Your thoroughness and clarity are helpful in mapping that path. I feel honored by your comments and reflections on the year and appreciate all the effort and time you devote to moving APS forward.

This has been a very good year and, even more important, it foreshadows better years ahead. Thank you again for the support and confidence in our work that you have offered this past year. I appreciate the opportunity to make a positive difference for the children and families of Andover.