

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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News from November-December 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members,

I would like to begin this newsletter with the news that as of July 1, Arlington Public Schools will have a new Superintendent. Dr. Elizabeth Homan was chosen by the School Committee after an extensive interview process that included input from staff and community members. She is completing her third year as Assistant Superintendent in Waltham. While serving in this position she has been active in aligning curriculum and establishing professional development to narrow the achievement gap and improve outcomes for all students. A smooth transition process has already begun. Serving as your Superintendent has been an honor and a privilege for me, and I wish Dr. Homan success as she assumes this role.

I would like to encourage all Arlington community members over the age of 15 to take the Envision Arlington Annual Town Survey: arlingtonma.gov/survey by the deadline of March 1, 2021. Results of the survey help identify resident needs and inform decisions around Town resources. This year's survey focuses on two predominant issues from 2020: COVID-19 and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. If you've already completed it, invite a neighbor or family member to take it as well. Paper copies are available in the vestibule of the Robbins Library for those who need assistance or do not have internet access. Due to COVID-19 you may request a copy be mailed to your home this year by emailing envision@town.arlington.ma.us or calling 781-316-3096 and leaving a message with your name and address.

I want to acknowledge again our tremendous sadness upon learning of the tragic death of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Marwan Ghabour, a 2011 graduate of Arlington High School. Marwan was killed in a helicopter crash in Egypt while serving on a United Nations peacekeeping mission. Many of our teachers remember Marwan as a student, and his loss is deeply felt. I want to express my sympathy to Marwan's family and all those who knew him.

Communicating with families whose home language is not English is of high importance to the Arlington Public Schools, and I want to be sure that everyone is aware of what is available to them. All documents that have been translated into the major languages used in our district can be downloaded from the [Translations](#) page on the APS website. An online translation process for all parent forms using Google Translate is also found on this page. Additionally, you may request that a document be translated into your home language, and/or request that an interpreter accompany you to meetings with school officials. If you have any questions or require further assistance, please email Hilary Dawson at hdawson@arlington.k12.ma.us.

I am happy to report that our families remained generous and thoughtful of others during the holiday season. They responded first to the Thanksgiving Food Drive which requested financial donations instead of food this year. Our families have also been generous supporters of the town-wide Holiday Helpers program in prior years, purchasing gifts from "wish lists" to ensure happy holidays for those in need. This year the program requested either a financial donation or gift cards in \$25 increments from stores such as Target, Walmart, or CVS, or major credit cards. The response was strong and a total of \$50,000 was raised that supported 229 children and 123 families. I thank everyone who was involved in these two efforts.

I continue to be impressed by the ways our schools and families are finding to strengthen their ties to each other and build community. Although we are unable to gather in person, there are many innovative and special ways that people are connecting. The following are only a few examples of the ways our students and families are coming together to have new experiences and share ideas.

- Members of Ms. Bell's fifth grade class at Bishop are writing, editing, and publishing an online newspaper.
- Peirce alum and meteorologist Maureen McCann took Peirce first grade students on a virtual visit to her News 13 weather station in Orlando.
- Dallin held a virtual show-and-tell playdate in December for both hybrid and remote Kindergarten students.
- Bishop held a Community Connection by grade level where hybrid and remote students could ZOOM with teachers and staff members to say hello to each other.
- Peirce students got to show off their costumes in a virtual Halloween parade.
- Students were encouraged to wear ugly sweaters, favorite hats, crazy socks, holiday colors, and pajamas during Ottoson's Spirit Week.
- AHS held a Gingerbread House contest, with winners getting Dunkin or Starbucks gift cards.
- Molly Atryzek, Visual Art teacher at Peirce, created a Quarter 1 Art Share using Padlet, posting art examples from each grade, and Gibbs teacher Alecia Serafini created virtual Student Art Shows, one for remote students and one for hybrid.
- Dallin families completed 1,843 miles in the Dallin: Stronger Together physical education challenge by walking in Arlington, doing laps around the track or block, or completing 15 minutes of exercise to log 1 mile.
- K-12 Library Coordinator Stacy Kitsis coordinated a subscription to SWANK streaming movie services for the school year that enables students to watch content enriching movies at home or in class.
- Peirce Rainbow Alliance holds virtual family read-alongs where students, families, and teachers read short picture books that share the LGBTQ+ experiences and perspectives.
- Peirce PTO Diversity and Inclusion Group is working with librarian Renae Nichols to hold three virtual book clubs: K/First grade, Second/Third grade, Fourth/Fifth grade.
- Dallin has organized an Antiracism Book Club for parents.
- Hardy has an English Conversation Group for adults who want to practice the language that includes five Hardy parent tutors who speak fluent English as well as French, Chinese, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and Hebrew.

We are also seeing a lot of emphasis on supporting teachers and staff, both within schools and from the community. "Shout outs" to recognize team members' hard work and flexibility within schools and departments are routine. Both [Quebrada Baking Company](#) and the [Butternut Bakehouse](#) are on hand regularly, the first at Peirce and the second at Arlington High School, to bring breakfast and baked goods to the staff. Additionally, giving to the [Arlington Education Foundation's](#) STARS teacher recognition program between July 1 and December 8 set a new record for generosity as families recognized the incredible effort that it is taking to educate our young people during the pandemic. I am grateful to everyone for the tremendous support being given to our district.

Everyone in APS is working hard to create a productive and supportive learning experience for our students during this challenging time, and you will see evidence of this in the articles below. I am heartened by the support we are giving and receiving.

Best regards,

Kathleen Bodie, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools

Headline View

Safe & Supportive Schools

AHS Antiracism Working Group Monthly Newsletters Available

I encourage you to review the [December](#) and [January](#) newsletters produced by the AHS Antiracism Working Group that contain updates on their accomplishments as well as topics of interest. [Learn more>](#)

INTERFACE Mental Health Referral Helpline Available to all Arlington Residents

The [William James INTERFACE Referral Service](#) mental health and wellness referral Helpline, a free, confidential service that matches individuals with a licensed mental health provider, is now available to all residents, thanks to the [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness](#) grant awarded to the Arlington Public Schools. [Read more>](#)

Diverse School Library Collections Celebrate the Variety of the Real World

Over 125 titles have been added to our elementary school libraries as part of the effort to diversify our collections to provide readers with books that reflect who they are and help them see others. [Learn more>](#)

AHS Wellness Day Observance Promotes Self-care and Mental Health Awareness

Although the structure of the 13th Wellness Day was different from other years, the focus on promoting balance and health for students and staff and destigmatizing mental health struggles and encourage asking for help was the same, as the young people took a break to participate in a fun activity of their choice. [Learn more>](#)

District News

Project Cost Reduced, Items Added Back as AHS Rebuild Marks Milestone

The town has signed a Guaranteed Maximum Price contract with [Consigli Construction](#) for the completion of the new Arlington High School which includes a lower price and the return of features that had previously been removed due to cost concerns. [Read more>](#)

Tech Support for Apps, Devices, and Digital Learning Resources Available

Please complete the [APS Parent/Guardian Ed Tech Support form](#) so that a member of our Digital Learning or Technology Department staff can assist your student(s) with technical issues involving applications, devices, or digital learning resources such as ZOOM or Google applications. [Learn more>](#)

Professional Development

November Professional Development Day Centers on Antiracist Teaching and Technology

On November 3, our educators came together virtually to continue their work to make Arlington Public Schools an antiracist, more equitable place to work and learn, and to discuss the use of technical tools that can make virtual teaching and interactions more effective. [Learn more>](#)

Awards & Distinctions

OMS Students Take Mathematics Honors In AMC8, Acton-Boxborough Math Competition

An Arlington seventh grade student achieved a perfect score on the [AMC8](#), (our first ever) and he and another seventh grade student were among the top scorers in the October [Acton-Boxborough Math Competition](#). [Read more>](#)

Three AHS Soccer Athletes Recognized for Excellence

Congratulations to Eric Widrick, Clair Ewen, and Sophia Saleh on achieving special recognition from the *Boston Herald*, *Boston Globe*, and Eastern Massachusetts Boys and Girls Coaches Associations. [Read more>](#)

Inclusive Teaching of Thanksgiving at Arlington Schools Included in Associated Press Article

The lesson that AP reporter Collin Binkley observed at Peirce and featured in [Thanksgiving lessons jettison Pilgrim hats, welcome truth](#) was the result of new resources that are helping our teachers engage students in more inclusive history. [Learn more>](#)

Hardy Teacher's Children's Book Addresses Fear of Needles

First grade teacher Katherine Picarde's recently published book, [The Little Ouch](#), has been released just in time to help fearful young people who are facing flu shots and the COVID vaccine. [Read more>](#)

Academics & Enrichment

Inquiry-based Elementary Science Keeps Hybrid and Remote Students Engaged

Online access to [FOSS](#) textbooks, videos, and simulations, the distribution of materials for hands-on investigations, and curriculum that can be done in-person and remotely keeps our elementary students engaged in active science learning. [Learn more>](#)

"For Freedoms" Project Gives Voice To Student Hopes for Election Day

The study of FDR's *4 Freedoms* speech included an exercise in civic engagement for Arlington eighth grade students who participated in voicing their freedoms on lawn signs displayed at the Robbins Library. [Read more>](#)

"Ottoson Insider", Voice of the Students, Coming Soon

After a COVID interruption, the OMS student-run newspaper with a staff of hybrid and remote seventh and eighth grade students has established a website and should be ready for viewing in mid-January. [Read more>](#)

Practices Prepare Gibbs/Ottoson Math Team Members for Online Contests, Tournaments

The middle school [Math Team](#) is going strong this year, as online mathematics competitions offer more opportunities for participation, and can be less overwhelming environments when compared to in-person contests. [Learn more>](#)

Creative Highlights

AHS Musicians and Vocalists Offer Music in Key with the Times

Even though they can't perform in the auditorium, members of AHS instrumental and choral groups are finding virtual ways to share their talents with the community. [Learn more>](#)

Robust, Uplifting AHS Drama Season Kicks-off with "It's A Wonderful Life, A Radio Play"

Auditioned, rehearsed, and livestream-performed remotely, *It's a Wonderful Life, A Radio Play* was a great start to an AHS drama season that will include Student Directed One-acts, a musical, and alumni written and directed pieces. [Read more>](#)

Athletic Highlights

Fall Season Ends for Athletes Competing in Four Sports

Congratulations to the 348 athletes who competed in Boys and Girls Cross Country, Boys and Girls Soccer, Field Hockey, and Golf this fall. [Learn more>](#)

Continue to read the full News from November-December 2020

Safe & Supportive Schools

AHS Antiracism Working Group Monthly Newsletters Available

In the [News from September-October](#), I introduced you to the AHS Antiracism Working Group (AWG) that is dedicated to "...discuss and act on ways to combat racism in our school." One of their activities is the

publication of a monthly video newsletter. The December and January issues are now available, and I encourage you to take a look. The newsletters range from about four to six minutes long and each one is chock-full of great information about accomplishments, resources, and history.

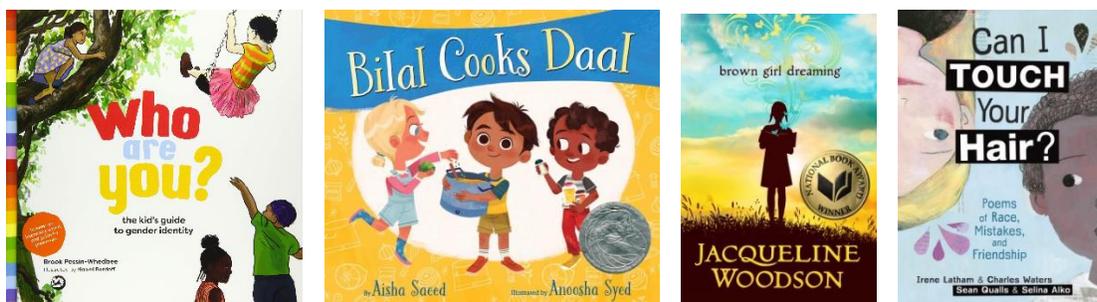
You will find the December AWG newsletter [here](#) and also in the [Past Newsletters](#) section of the group's website. The January issue is on the [AWG home page](#) and this is where you will want to go to see each new monthly addition in the future. I want to compliment all those involved in producing this valuable contribution to our community.

INTERFACE Mental Health Referral Helpline Available to all Arlington Residents

Director of School Counseling and Social Emotional Learning Sarah Burd wants everyone to know that the [William James INTERFACE Referral Service](#) mental health and wellness referral Helpline is now available to all Arlington residents. This is a free, confidential service. Arlington became one of the participating communities through the [Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness](#) grant that I reported on in the News from September-October newsletter. The goal is to match individuals with licensed mental health providers, with each referral best meeting the location, insurance, and specialty needs of the caller.

Each call is taken by a referral counselor who completes a confidential intake requiring about 15-20 minutes. A few days later you are contacted to inform you that a match is being researched. Once identified, you receive the providers' name, credentials, location, and phone number. Within one to two weeks your referral counselor checks with you to see if you have reached the provider and if so, how things are going. Once the match is successful, the referral counselor will close the process with you.

The INTERFACE hotline, **888-244-6843**, is available Monday through Friday from 9 am-5 pm. You may want to view this short introductory [video](#). Many of us are aware of the difficulty in finding a mental health provider, particularly during the pandemic. I am pleased that we are able to offer this important service to the community.



Diverse School Library Collections Celebrate the Variety of the Real World

An important part of the identity and anti-racism work that Arlington Public Schools has been doing is recognizing that children need books that reflect who they are and help them see others. Reading such books aloud to students is an excellent way to affirm identity while helping build empathy and understanding. During 2020, APS invested in diversifying the elementary library collections, adding over 125 titles to what was already present thanks to earlier work by paraprofessionals and PTOs. The updates and additions to the library collections are continuing in the 2020-2021 school year.

The characters, authors, illustrators, storylines, and art in the chosen books celebrate the wonderful variety that makes up our world. Every effort has been made to choose books that are authentic, accurate, and not solely focused on a single facet of someone's identity--books that reflect the real world around us. The library paraprofessionals are sharing many of these essential stories with their classes throughout the year.

Teachers, children, and families are encouraged to reach out to the Library staff members for help in locating and borrowing books that meet needs and interests: 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, Mamie Webster at Thompson, Nicole Doliner at Gibbs, Edith Moissand at Ottoson, Elementary Professional Librarian Jennifer Lauchlan, AHS Library and K-12 Library Coordinator Stacy Kitsis. I thank these staff members for their work to ensure that our young people are exposed to literature that breaks through the narrow boundaries of traditional children's books.

AHS Wellness Day Observance Promotes Self-care and Mental Health Awareness

Although it had to be different, Intervention Coordinator and Social Worker Andrea Razi was not going to let a year go by without having AHS students stop, take a breath, and participate in an activity that was just for them. For the last 12 years Arlington High School has observed Wellness Day, a time devoted to promoting balance and health for students and staff and to destigmatize mental health struggles and encourage asking for help. I am happy to say that this wonderful tradition continued on December 2, 2020.

The plan for the day was introduced with a video by Ms. Razi during Advisory on November 18. She stressed how it is normal to be feeling sad, tired, bored, lonely, and to be struggling to cope during this pandemic, and that everyone should feel comfortable asking for assistance from the many individuals at AHS who can and want to help. She also encouraged them to sign-up for one of the fun activities that were planned for X block on Wellness Day.

The December 2 observance began in Advisory at 11:30 am, where the students had the opportunity to view the video, [7 Ways to Be Happier According to Science](#). Yale Professor Laurie Santos, the instructor who offers what is the most popular class in the university's history, describes the kinds of things that all of us can do on a daily basis to be happier. Everyone was then asked to take five minutes and use Google Jamboard to share ways they can have fun and take care of themselves during this pandemic.

After spending some time talking about the different ideas that had been shared, the students moved on to the activities they had chosen. These took place from 12:00-1:00 pm, and all were managed safely. Some students decided to participate or become an audience member in a virtual AHS concert. Others chose to go outside for a scavenger hunt or nature walk. It was possible to join a club meeting or participate in an online workshop such as playing games or doing a craft or yoga. Whatever they chose, the focus was on self-care and fun.

I want to thank Ms. Razi and her partners K-12 Library Coordinator and AHS Media Director Stacy Kitsis and Special Programs teacher Brian Buck for spearheading Wellness Day, and the students and teachers who volunteered to lead workshops. As always, this year's event is a wonderful example of how members of the AHS community can come together to take a break and support the health and well-being of our young people.

District News

Project Cost Reduced, Items Added Back as AHS Rebuild Marks Milestone

By signing a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract with [Consigli Construction](#), the Town of Arlington has directed the company to finish building the new Arlington High School as per the final design. I am happy to report that the GMP includes a return of lighting at the new athletic fields, a ramp to the Minuteman Bikeway, and a signal at Mill Street. In addition, the AHS Building Committee added HVAC enhancements including bipolar ionization and a more robust air filtration system. The final maximum cost for the construction is roughly \$1M less than the construction cost approved in 2019. The reduced figure is the result of competitive bidding and changes in the economy during 2020.

The following graphic shows the current timeline for the project.

	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

Phase 1 of the project is now underway, and anyone who passes by the site can see that the building of a new classroom wing and auditorium has begun. The AHS Building Project Committee has created several wonderful [videos](#) that will help you track the progress. The [Superintendent's Project Update](#) summarizes the work done to date and presents a picture of what is to come. Please check the Arlington High School Building Project [website](#) for news and background information. You may also sign up for Construction Updates, the bi-monthly bulletin, and submit questions via email [here](#). A timeline and grade comparison chart can be found [here](#).

Tech Support for Apps, Devices, and Digital Learning Resources Available

I want to remind everyone that technical support is available to help your student(s) with apps, devices, and digital learning resources such as ZOOM, Google applications, etc. To request assistance, please complete the [APS Parent/Guardian Ed Tech Support form](#). You will receive a confirmation email after you submit your request.

Each submission will be reviewed by a member of the APS Digital Learning or Technology Department staff who will alert the appropriate department. Many requests can be responded to within one school day, but if the issues require us to contact an educational technology vendor, it could take more time. Please contact your child's teacher if you do not hear from us within four days. The link to the request form can also be found on the [Digital Learning page](#) of the APS website. I thank everyone who has worked to make it possible for us to offer this service to our families.

Professional Development

November Professional Development Day Centers on Antiracist Teaching and Technology

On November 3, our teachers, staff members, and administrators came together virtually for a full day of professional development. The day was divided into two parts, with the morning dedicated to a continuation of our equity and antiracism work, and the afternoon centering on technical tools and how to make our virtual teaching more effective.

The morning section provided time for focused conversations on becoming an antiracist, more equitable place to work and learn. It began with an Edcamp which is a model of shared responsibility for learning. All potential attendees were invited to submit ideas for discussion around Identity and Introspection.

These topics were then collated by the planning committee and listed on a Session Board. When the meeting began, everyone pursued their particular interest by choosing a topic from the board and becoming part of a discussion group. Edcamp groups are participant-driven and a chance for educators to share their experiences and knowledge with others and make connections with their colleagues.

During Edcamp, attendees were able to choose from topics such as *Designing Anti-Racist Learning Opportunities*, *Using Picture Books to Talk About Race*, *Reflections on Unconscious Bias*, *Bringing Latinx History into our Classroom*, *Confronting Bias in School Discipline*, and *Discussing Gender in the Classroom*, among many others. This short [video](#) will help you understand more about how Edcamps bring people together to share their thoughts on important topics.

During Session 2, the participants split between preschool/elementary and secondary to continue exploring the topic of Identity and Introspection in ways that were more specific to the grade levels they work with. Session 3 was time for the attendees to join their building teams. Here each principal was able to lead a debrief of what had been learned in Session 2 and craft a discussion that was appropriate to their particular student community. Session 4, the last of the morning, asked participants to join their grade/content teams to discuss next steps. Discussions here centered around how to implement changes to support antiracist teaching in their particular grade or curriculum area.

In the afternoon, everyone was able to choose and attend two Edcamp sessions that involved technical tools or issues of interest to them. These topics had been collected prior to November 3 and were listed on a Session Board. Attendees were able to join discussion groups such as *Integrating New Apps into Google Classroom*, *Building a Great Screencastify Video*, *Creating Interesting Slideshows for Online Learning*, *Using Teacher Desk by Naviance*, and *Using Document Cameras*.

I want to thank Assistant Superintendent Dr. Roderick MacNeal Jr. and the members of the planning board who worked so hard to create and execute this important day. I also thank all those who submitted discussion topics. Being able to spend an entire day together gives our educators time to communicate in ways that can't happen day-to-day--to converse in-depth on particular topics. I am pleased that even during these difficult times we are able to come together and consider topics that will improve our teaching and strengthen our educational community.

Awards & Distinctions

OMS Students Take Mathematics Honors In AMC8, Acton-Boxborough Math Competition

For several years we have offered interested students the opportunity to take the [AMC 8](#), a nationwide contest run by the [Mathematical Association of America](#). It is a very challenging test consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions that range from somewhat easy to extremely difficult. In a typical year, around 100,000 middle school students participate.

I am delighted to be able to tell you that Ottoson seventh grade student Jiahe Liu scored Arlington's first-ever 25—a perfect score. Jiahe is one of only seven students in Massachusetts and 53 across the country to achieve this. This year approximately 53,000 students took the AMC8, and the national average was 9.94.

Jiahe was also the only seventh grade student with a perfect score in the November Online [Acton-Boxborough Math Competition](#) (ABMC). He and fellow Math Team member Xitiz Shakya, also in the seventh grade, were among the top scorers in the October ABMC. Use this [link](#) to see the questions these two students had to solve to achieve this distinction.

I want to congratulate Jiahe and Xitiz on these wonderful achievements. I also want to congratulate all of our students who choose to challenge themselves with mathematics contests and competitions. For more information about the Gibbs/Ottoson Math Team, please see ***Practices Prepare Gibbs/Ottoson Math Team Members for Online Contests, Tournaments*** in the **Academics & Enrichment** section of this newsletter.

Three AHS Soccer Athletes Recognized for Excellence

It was a great season for the AHS Boys and Girls Soccer teams, and it was wonderful to see three of our athletes receive special recognitions. Goalkeeper Eric Widrick, junior, was honored by being named as a *Boston Herald* All-Scholastic, *Boston Globe* All-Star, Eastern Massachusetts Boys Soccer Coaches Association All-Star, and Massachusetts All-State team member. Senior Claire Ewen was recognized as a *Boston Herald* All-Scholastic, *Boston Globe* All-Star, Eastern Massachusetts Girls Soccer Coaches Association First Team All-Star, and Massachusetts All-State Team member. Her teammate Sophia Saleh, senior, was named to the Eastern Massachusetts Girls Soccer Coaches Association Second Team.

Congratulations to Eric, Claire, and Sophia. To read more about the AHS fall athletic season, please see ***Fall Season Ends for Athletes Competing in Four Sports*** in the **[Athletic Highlights](#)** section of this newsletter.

Inclusive Teaching of Thanksgiving at Arlington Schools Included in Associated Press Article

“We don’t want the coloring books of the Pilgrims and the Native Americans,” said Crystal Power, a social studies coach. “We want students to engage with what really happened, with who lived here first, and to understand that there was no such thing as the New World. It was only new from one side’s perspective.”

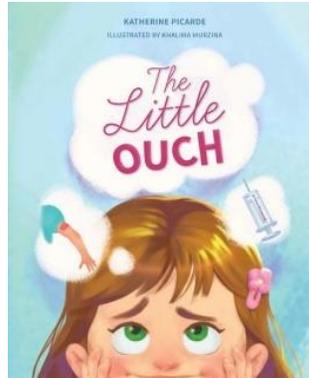
Ms. Power’s quote comes from the Associated Press article [Thanksgiving lessons jettison Pilgrim hats, welcome truth](#), written by Collin Binkley and issued on November 23. The author was investigating changes that are occurring in classrooms around the country, and I am delighted that our work to teach history more inclusively was one of the examples that Mr. Binkley cited. The journalist had the opportunity to directly understand how our educators are doing this during his visit to Peirce. Along with Ms. Power and Social Studies Director Denny Conklin, he observed first grade teacher Elena Haro focusing on teaching about Thanksgiving from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples.

Ms. Haro’s lesson is the result of curriculum revisions being spearheaded by Ms. Power that are in line with the district’s initiatives around identity and cultural responsiveness. As she explains it, “Traditionally, our stories and histories have been largely presented from one perspective. History is made up of all of our stories, and we feel it is essential that we include all voices--especially those who have been marginalized in the past. It’s important that all of our students can see their identities reflected and recognized, while also having the chance to enrich their own lives by learning about the experiences of others. While doing so is a shift from what many consider ‘history,’ it’s an important foundation for creating citizens who care for others and are willing to consider multiple points of view.”

New resources for teaching Thanksgiving were provided to our elementary teachers to help them engage students in more inclusive history. Children’s picture books are typically filled with negative, and sometimes harmful, stereotypes about the Wampanoag. The new resources are designed to ensure that students understand the Wampanoag perspective of the past, but also acknowledge their presence today. Ms. Power says that teachers are also encouraged to explore thanksgiving traditions from different cultures. Still considered in the pilot state, teachers will revisit and revise the Thanksgiving resources this summer.

The way our Library classes explored Columbus Day this year is another example of how we are including the history of Indigenous People in our teaching. Students read books by native authors and illustrators and discussed the story of Columbus and the history of the holiday. For the last 12 years, students at Bishop have been able to take part in a Mock Election during each Presidential election year. This year’s ballot featured a question instead of candidates: “Should the name of the Columbus Day holiday be changed to Indigenous People’s Day at Bishop School?” Over 90.8% of voters favored changing the name.

It is always gratifying to see the efforts of our educators recognized beyond our community. I want to thank Ms. Power and Mr. Conklin for doing the important work of making sure our teachers can build lessons focused on inclusion and from the perspective of those who are often left out. I also thank Ms. Haro for her willingness to have Mr. Binkley visit her classroom so that he could include our work in his story.



Hardy Teacher's Children's Book Addresses Fear of Needles

Hardy first grade teacher Katherine Picarde loves children's literature and has always wanted to write a book of her own for young people. Considering ideas, she remembered her fear of needles and getting shots when she was a child. There didn't seem to be any books on overcoming that fear, so [The Little Ouch](#), officially released on December 1, 2020 was born. Based on the young Ms. Picarde, the main character struggles with her fear and works hard to avoid the inevitable.

Although it wasn't planned this way, the release of this book comes at a very important time, as young people face both flu shots and the upcoming COVID vaccine. This makes it particularly meaningful for Ms. Picarde, and she has received many heartwarming stories from parents and children. Families bring the book to their flu shot appointment, read it in the car on the way to the doctor, and pediatric patients keep it next to their bed in the hospital where it can be used to give them some extra encouragement. Ms. Picarde was able to donate about 400 books to the brave pediatric patients and child life specialists of Boston Children's, Floating, Shriners, Franciscan's, and Newton-Wellesley Hospitals, the Jimmy Fund Clinic, Boston Medical Center, and Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute in New York months before the release date.

The author is thrilled with the response. At one point the book was ranked #4 under Children's Health Books on Amazon and it was nominated for the TCK Publishing 2020 Reader's Choice Awards contest. The book has been deposited in the Little Free Libraries all across greater Boston. It is now available in 16 bookstores in Massachusetts, and several in Vermont and New Hampshire, and is making its way all around the world including to Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Mascot Books, Barnes & Noble, Walmart, Target, and Amazon have it available online.

In November, Ms. Picarde was a featured author in the Portsmouth, New Hampshire [Strawbery Banke Museum's](#) Virtual Children's Book Festival and she was [interviewed by Boston Channel 4 CBS news](#) in December. She feels very fortunate to have had the support of family, friends, coworkers, and students who have helped her to market the book through social media and email, attended her book signing event, and purchased it for holiday gifts.

Writing about *The Little Ouch* in the October 2020 issue of [Story Monsters Ink](#), reviewer Darlene Wohfeil states, "This is a great story to calm the fears of little ones facing those dreaded events of life that can't be avoided." I want to congratulate Ms. Picarde on the publication of her first children's book, one that I know will bring both laughter and comfort to the children who struggle with a fear of needles.

Academics & Enrichment



Inquiry-based Elementary Science Keeps Hybrid and Remote Students Engaged

The [FOSS](#) science curriculum that is used in grades K-5 is based on the way students learn, with hands-on inquiry-based instruction. This involves student “investigations” as well as reading and writing about informational texts. Science Coach Sarah Huber knew that there would be challenges ahead to continue this way of learning, but she also knew that it was going to be a great way to keep students engaged. So, she started early—buying enough supplies over the summer so that the teachers could send materials home with their students for some of the key investigations in each unit.

For example, second grade students received three different kinds of rocks so they could study erosion, rocks, landforms, and mapping. These enabled them to make observations, understand clay and its properties, and build and map landforms as they learned map-making skills. Third grade students received pots, soil, and seeds, so they could grow and experiment with plants, and learn about climate, adaptations, and inheritance.

The sugar cubes and container that went home with fourth grade students was used to observe weathering, and the materials for wind-powered cars drove exploration of renewable resource engineering. Fifth grade students received soil, seeds, and pots to explore photosynthesis, and also got a bag to be used to observe and investigate decomposition as they focused on living systems. Kindergarten and first grade students were able to use recyclables or common household items for their explorations in engineering, air, weather, and patterns in the sky.

Ms. Huber has been working throughout the fall, creating curriculum that can be done either in person or remotely. Two science lessons per week are recommended, one of which should be held in-person for the hybrid students. Everyone can access the FOSS textbooks, videos, and simulations remotely.

I want to thank Ms. Huber for all of the hard work she has done to make sure our elementary students, whether hybrid or remote, continue their inquiry-based, investigative science studies. She occupies one of two new coaching positions in the district this year. The other position, Social Studies Coach, is held by Crystal Power. Two social studies lessons per week are also recommended, with one in-person for the hybrid students. Ms. Power has also been working hard on creating curriculum, and you can learn about some of the things she has been concentrating on in ***Inclusive Teaching of Thanksgiving at Arlington Schools Included in Associated Press Article*** in the [Awards & Distinctions](#) section of this newsletter.



“For Freedoms” Project Gives Voice To Student Hopes for Election Day

I hope that many of you were able to see the inspiring installation of lawn signs that were on display outside the Robbins Library in late October through early November. Our eighth grade Civics students were invited to share their thoughts on what was important to them by completing prompts: Freedom for, Freedom of, Freedom to, and Freedom from. The request came during the time that the students were learning about the freedoms FDR laid out in his [4 Freedoms speech](#) in 1941.

The project was a collaboration between our OMS students, Robbins Library, Waltham Library, and the [For Freedoms](#) organization, an artist-led group dedicated to increasing civic engagement. Each young person was able to reflect on what was important to them and bring forward their hopes as Election Day approached. It was a wonderful way to bring Civics to life and let the community hear their voices.

I am pleased that our students took up the challenge and participated in this meaningful installation. You can find more information on the project and what the library hoped to accomplish [here](#). Civic participation is a critical component of our democracy, and this project is a great way for our young people to experience what that can mean.

“Ottoson Insider”, Voice of the Students, Coming Soon

Last spring, some hardworking students decided that the time was ripe for an Ottoson newspaper. An enterprising seventh grade student assumed the role of Editor-in-Chief, designed lessons with Science teacher and newspaper advisor Alexander Burgun-Tower, assigned articles, and held meetings. The group managed to print one issue of the *Ottoson Insider* before COVID hit. But they were off to a great start, with features that included an interview with Mr. Meringer, a feature about the Robbins Library, and a look into how racial injustice affects students’ mental health.

The now eighth grade Editor-in-Chief is back and has been eager to get things running again. Interest is high, with over 40 members signing up to take part. Both remote and hybrid students from seventh and eighth grades are involved. They participate in weekly ZOOM meeting to check in with questions, attend mini-lessons that are nearly entirely student-led, and hold meetings for the section editors.

The group has decided on an online publication, and they have had a lot to learn. They have reached out to a few other online school news sites, such as the Wayland Student Press Network, for advice and possible collaboration and lessons. They have also reached out to the AHS student newspaper.

I am delighted to report that the website is now established and as of this writing, the team is learning how to upload their stories. The plan is to have the *Ottoson Insider* up and running by mid-January, and then updated with at least two new articles every week.

I want to thank Mr. Burgun-Tower for overseeing this student-led project that is such a great way to get our middle school students involved in their community. He wants us to know that the article assignments and almost all the actual content comes from the students. The Editor-in-Chief designs most of the mini-lessons. As advisor, Mr. Burgun-Tower sets up meetings and answers questions. Look for information on how to read this young newspaper in my next newsletter.

Practices Prepare Gibbs/Ottoson Math Team Members for Online Contests, Tournaments

I am happy to report that the middle school Math Team, under the leadership of Coach Jon McIntyre, is going strong again this year. The group meets online and includes both Gibbs and Ottoson students. About 43 Gibbs students and 24 Ottoson students are on the active mailing list.

For each meeting, Mr. McIntyre prepares two sets of problems, accommodating the different skill levels of participants. The most advanced students work harder problems in a breakout room. Mr. McIntyre does some direct teaching with the remaining students, then has them work on problems in groups of three or four in different breakout rooms. After everyone has had a chance to work, they come back together as a group and review what has been done. Both students and Mr. McIntyre are involved in the explanations. The work is completed on Google Forms, so Mr. McIntyre can see who has gotten problems right and which ones are most difficult for the students.

Participation in the [AMC 8](#), a nationwide contest run by the [Mathematical Association of America](#) was offered again this November. It is a very challenging test consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions that range from somewhat easy to extremely difficult. Around 100,000 middle school students choose to participate each year. This is the first year it was offered online. Mr. McIntyre has spearheaded our participation in the AMC 8 for several years. Proctoring was a challenge due to the online test, but parents stepped up to help ensure a well-run 40 minute contest. A total of 57 Gibbs and Ottoson students chose to participate.

Since mathematics competitions are being offered online, there are actually more contests available to our young people than in previous years. Thus far, members of the Math Team have taken part in some California-based contests, and for the first time, a team of girls took part in an [inteGIRLS](#) contest and a California-based girls-only contest. In December, several students participated in the [Lexington Math Tournament](#). The team round of 30 very difficult questions was spread out over a week. This enabled students to meet with their teammates via video calls and work on problems as their schedules allowed. The online tournaments have the advantage of being a little less overwhelming than in-person contests.

Math Team members also took part in the [Aretelabs Math Madness](#) tournament. Mr. McIntyre believes that Aretelabs offers a good online platform for head-to-head contests against other schools, thanks to their seven years of offering competitions in this way. Our young people did well in the warmup rounds—winning every matchup. This seeded them in the highest of four brackets, however, so they fell to a top team in the first round.

[MATHCOUNTS](#) is considered the BIG contest for middle school students every year, and that is coming up. Only 15 students from each school are allowed to participate, so it is important for those interested to start preparing early and use all the tools at their disposal. The final team will be determined on or around January 14th.

It is very exciting to hear about all the competitions that our young mathematics enthusiasts are taking part in this year. I am grateful to Mr. McIntyre for continuing to lead the Math Team and provide so many opportunities for participation. You may follow the Math Team activities and learn more [here](#).

Creative Highlights

AHS Musicians and Vocalists Offer Music in Key with the Times

One of the great joys of being an AHS musician or vocalist is making music together in Concert Band, Orchestra, Jazz Band, and Choral ensembles. So, it is understandable that these creative young people are looking for ways to make this happen.

AHS Junior Daniel Gorbunov, a pianist in the Jazz Band with experience in audio and visual recording, decided that it was time to get the group back together, even if they had to do it virtually. So, over 20 band members came to Director Sabatino D'Agostino's backyard individually where they were recorded

playing Herbie Hancock's *Chameleon*, a great jazz standard. ACMi's Youth Coordinator Kevin Wetmore, helped out with cameras and microphones, and then Daniel put it all together digitally. The result is this great [video](#) that includes some terrific trombone, keyboard, drum, and saxophone solos. It is wonderful to see these talented musicians "playing together."

On November 20, the community was able to "attend" *Music for Healing*, a virtual concert that included solo, duet, and small group instrumental and vocal performances by students from various AHS Performing Arts ensembles and the Music Technology program. The 1 ½ hour [concert](#) includes 29 performances that cover all styles of music from classical to folk to contemporary and jazz. This was a wonderful way for our young people to illustrate how they are continuing to grow musically even though they can't perform in their usual ways.

I am happy to let you know that more performances are planned. A *Virtual Winter Concert* is scheduled for January 29 that will air at 7:00 pm and A *Virtual Spring Concert* is planned for March 21. You can keep up to date by consulting the Arlington High School Performing Arts [website](#). I congratulate the Performing Arts faculty, Mr. Wetmore, and all the students who have led and contributed to the performances to date and look forward to what they bring us in the future.



Robust, Uplifting AHS Drama Season Kicks-off with "It's A Wonderful Life, A Radio Play"

For many of us, watching the 1946 Frank Capra movie *It's A Wonderful Life* was part of the way we celebrated the December holidays. Everything seemed better after seeing George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart), a truly good man, rise above his troubles and realize how much he meant to many people. So, it was a special joy to be able to log into the livestream the weekend before Christmas and watch the talented AHS thespians deliver *It's a Wonderful Life, A Radio Play*.

The only thing that brought the students together physically at the same time was the costume and prop pick-up. Auditions, rehearsals, and the final performances were entirely remote. The cast rehearsed on ZOOM every day for five weeks. To add emphasis to the theme of the positive effect one person can have on so many others, members of the community were invited to send in videos. These were used to create a sing along that included families singing, people dancing, and even pets.

Producer and AHS English teacher Lianna Bessette, Director and Drama teacher Michael Byrne, and ACMi Youth Coordinator Kevin Wetmore joined the 33 actors and six stage managers to make the production a huge success. AHS senior Avery Spellmeyer edited the play so that the audience saw something that didn't look like a typical ZOOM call. Mr. Byrne says that he really appreciated all the district support he received on what he calls the Drama Department's "new adventure". APS Purchasing Agent, Neile Emond moved quickly to set up new vendors and Digital Learning Director Susan Bisson and Digital Learning Specialist Jeff Snyder generously worked extra hours.

ACMi did a great promotional [video](#), that you may want to view, and it is fun to be able to report that the play generated some interest beyond our borders. The cast and crew received good will wishes from

Senator Elizabeth Warren and from the playwright, Joe Landry. You may listen to Mr. Landry's remarks [here](#).

It is exciting that this is just the beginning of a robust AHS drama season! Student-Directed One-Acts will be performed January 12-14. Three teams are directing these. The choice to co-direct is another way the drama department is promoting and building community. Commitment is high as this project is completely student-driven. The auditions for the spring musical, *Amour*, and the one-acts are being done together.

Next up is *Love and Information* on February 4-6, under the direction of AHS alum ('09) and NYU Tisch School of the Arts ('13) graduate Lauren ZefTel. Ms. ZefTel has already chosen the 15 member cast for this show as the auditions were done at the same time as those for *It's A Wonderful Life*, *A Radio Play*. In March, another AHS alum, Aaron Aptaker ('09) and DePaul University graduate ('13), will direct a devised play, where he will lead the students in collaboratively writing it.

We live in a difficult time, so the plays presented this season will have light and uplifting stories. Pulling the season together has been quite a learning curve and getting permission to present the pieces has been a challenge. In order to stream a play, special permission has to be negotiated with the publishing houses. Along the way Mr. Byrne has had some denials and the process takes extra time as the publishing houses are overwhelmed by high school drama teachers wanting to get the necessary permissions.

I want to thank Mr. Byrne and all those who have provided the necessary support that is giving our students and our community a wonderful drama season. I also thank AHS junior Ryan Beck for designing the terrific ZOOM-call poster that is above this article. Congratulations to the cast of *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Radio Play*, and we are all looking forward to the upcoming productions. I will keep you updated as the season unfolds, but you may also want to key an eye on the Performing Arts [website](#) so you don't miss any of the terrific things that are planned.

Athletic Highlights

Fall Season Ends for Athletes Competing in Four Sports

The fall season has ended, and I am pleased to say that we were able to offer four sports during this unusual year: Boys and Girls Cross Country, Boys and Girls Soccer, Field Hockey, and Golf. (Football and corresponding Cheerleading, Girls Swimming, and Girls Volleyball did not take place.) It was great to see 410 students participate in the fall tryout week, and to have about 348 become team members—131 as varsity athletes.

All teams competed against Woburn, Winchester, Reading, Lexington, and Belmont. Varsity Cross Country played a five game schedule, while the other teams competed in ten games. Varsity athletes averaged about eight hours a week of practices/games with their teams and coaches. Sub-varsity athletes practiced twice a week and played a game on Saturday. Their in-person time averaged out to six hours a week with their teams and coaches.

Hard work and determination brought solid results for the varsity teams.

- Boys Cross Country finished the season with a 4-1 record, making them the winners of the 2020 Middlesex League Liberty Division Championship. Wins in the last three races put them into first place, and this is their third title in the last four years.
- Girls Cross Country ended the season with a 3-2 record.
- Boys Soccer finished the season at 5-1-3, a record that earned them the title of Middlesex League Co-Champions.
- Girls Soccer finished strong as well, with a 7-2-1 record.
- Field Hockey ended the season at 5-4-1.
- Golf finished with a 4-6 record.

Congratulations to all our fall athletes and their coaches. Winter sports tryouts started on December 14, and we can look forward to our young people competing in Boys and Girls Basketball, Boys and Girls Hockey, Gymnastics, and Alpine Skiing. (Boys and Girls Indoor Track, Boys Swimming, and Wrestling will not be held.) There are 217 students registered. It is expected that practice will be held as in the fall, with Varsity practicing three days a week and sub-varsity two days a week. The teams will play a ten game schedule. Basketball games and Gymnastics meets will be held mostly on the weekends, holidays, and February vacation. Hockey games will depend upon rink availability. The winter season ends no later than February 21.