

ARPS Strategic Plan Introduction

There is much to be proud of in the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District. Amherst Regional High School offers a wide array of elective courses including options in STEM, performing arts, fine arts, world languages and English-Language arts, and offers Advanced Placement courses in Calculus (AB and BC), Chinese, French, Latin, Spanish, European History, Biology, Physics Mechanics, Environmental Science, Computer Science Principles, and English Literature and Composition. Students may sign up for dual enrollment with Greenfield Community College or Holyoke Community College, and qualified upper-grade students may enroll in courses at Amherst College, Hampshire College or UMass to pursue advanced studies. In the senior class of 2019, 42% are enrolled in either AP Calculus or in Multivariable Calculus at Amherst College; 34% are enrolled in AP Biology, AP Physics Mechanics or AP Environmental Science; 38% are enrolled in Engineering and Computer Science courses; 26% are enrolled in performance arts classes; and 55% are in fine arts classes. ARPS students receive a myriad of local, state and national honors, both individually and for team activities. The Class of 2018 had 11 Valedictorian students, each with perfect GPAs. Over the past ten years, an average of 90% of ARHS graduates indicated that they planned to pursue higher education immediately after high school.

In addition to the strong academic achievements of ARPS students, the District provides many opportunities for students beyond academics. There are 15 individual and team sports available to Amherst Regional Middle School students and 19 available to Amherst Regional High School students. In 2018, the ARHS Field Hockey team won the State Field Hockey MIAA Sportsmanship Award; the Girls Cross Country team won the Western MA Championship; the girls Alpine Ski team won the Eastern League title and the boys Ultimate Frisbee team was the Massachusetts State Champion and winner of the Pioneer Valley Invitational Tournament. There are 12 student clubs at ARMS and 44 at ARHS, offering a range of opportunities to get involved in social activities, affinity groups, and community service.

While the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District offers excellent opportunities, the District believes strongly in the need for continual improvement to ensure we are meeting the needs of each student entrusted to our care. The strategic planning document is designed to guide the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District's work over the next three years to reach the objectives and outcomes developed by the Strategic Planning Team and endorsed by the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee. These objectives build upon and expand work already being done by the district over the past several years, including many specific achievements in the 2018-2019 school year:

Objective A

Increase and maintain staff diversity to reflect student diversity; increase the number of teaching staff who are people of color

- Through significant work on recruitment and retention, the district [has increased the percentage of staff members](#) of color over the past several years. We continue to diversify the schools' faculty by making significant [revisions to the interview and hiring process](#) in the district. These changes resulted from recommendations of a working group that reviewed the Districts' hiring process last spring. An additional change to the hiring process is that all staff members who participate in the screening and interview process will receive training on both the process and implicit bias prior to beginning their work.
- The district has also sought resources to increase our capacity around the recruitment of diverse candidates. We applied for, and received, a competitive grant award from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the [Pilot Teacher Diversification Program](#) to extend our work in developing and building capacity by supporting the districts' diverse paraeducators in obtaining their licenses and becoming applicants for teacher positions. This grant complements [our existing work with Mount Holyoke College](#), which will extend into the 2019-2020 school year.
- District representatives have attended multiple job fairs, including locally, in the Boston area, and in Puerto Rico, in order to diversify our candidates for positions. Staff also worked with DESE and UMass to co-facilitate a job fair this spring for diverse educators-in-training in Western Massachusetts.
- As of May 7, 2019 15 Unit A (teachers) vacancies have been filled in the districts. Of those, over half of the candidates recommended for hire identify as people of color, which is more than double the current percentage of staff of color within this bargaining unit. The one administrative hiring process this year has been completed with a highly-qualified candidate of color being hired.

Objective B

Strengthen instructional practices to foster student engagement and connection to teachers and to the school

- Our second-year teachers program has focused specifically on [social justice education](#). We structure the program this way to provide the development and expectations for staff members prior to the district's decision of whether to grant professional teacher status after the third year in the district.
- An ongoing group of staff members has engaged in the MTSS (Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports) for ELs working group. This work has been instrumental in accomplishing much-needed, significant tasks, such as formalizing [a family interview process](#) when ELL students enroll in the district to forge closer relationships and gather information that will assist the district in meeting the student's and family's needs; creating an Individual Learning Plan for all [SLIFE](#) students in the district; developing [a document](#) for use in Child Study Meetings, which contains information specific to English Learners to be considered when discussing a student who is not making effective progress; and providing training and [a guide](#) to understanding the complexity of multilingual students and the spectrum of bilingualism.

Objective C

Strengthen instructional practice to respond to the cultural identities of students of color while dismantling white supremacy¹ in the system, for all students

- A major focus this year was providing high-quality professional development focused on social justice. For the second consecutive year, the district dedicated half of the fall curriculum day to topics shown to be relevant through surveying and interviewing staff members about their needs, skills, and experiences. [The workshops offered](#) showcased the depth and breadth of staff members' talents and interests in this domain. [The feedback from the sessions](#) illustrated the impact the day had on staff members' practice.
- At the Regional Level, all staff were trained [by Ed Mitnick](#) about bias-based incidents. The training had a particular focus on promoting a healthy school culture for all staff and students, as well as an updated understanding of protected classes and actions that impact members of those classes in significant ways.
- When information was released about a question with troubling content on a high school MCAS test this spring, I developed a [draft statement](#) to be considered by the Regional School Committee. The letter was unanimously supported by the School Committee and, beyond sending the letter to the Commissioner and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I have followed up with Department's Equity and Diversity Office on the matter. The practice of advocating for equity in the materials that our students access is a significant part of ensuring that all members of our community feel supported and fully embraced.
- The High School has started to include reflection time and engagement with the curriculum from [BarWe](#) into faculty meetings to build a climate of active anti-racist education across the school environment.

Objective D

Prioritize the emotional wellbeing of students while maintaining high expectations for success

- The District applied for and received a multi-year (up to five years) [grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) for \$95,000 a year to support expanding the BRYT program to the Middle School and for hiring a lead nurse for the district.
- The high school's work on the topic of student well-being was aided in the 2018-2019 school year by [a presentation and workshop](#) by [Challenge Success](#), which followed up on work from the prior year and included data from ARHS students and a larger national sample about their experience with homework, overscheduling, sleep, and stress.
- The High School integrated [a formal lesson](#) into their advisory program on ways to support students in being able to define stress, recognize symptoms and triggers, and build coping strategies. As an outcome, the counseling department developed a seven-session course for interested students on stress management; ten students enrolled in this initial course.

¹ For context of the meaning of institutional white supremacy in the field of education, please view Haynes, C. (2017). Dismantling the White Supremacy Embedded in Our Classrooms: White Faculty in Pursuit of More Equitable Educational Outcomes for Racially Minoritized Students. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 29(1), 87-107, at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1135971.pdf>

- The High School's MSAN students were supported in [creating workshops](#) around the topic of mental health and diversity that all high school students participated in. Thirteen staff members took [a course](#) about recognizing student mental health issues and responding with effective strategies to support them.

Objective E

Widen learning opportunities (e.g., STEM electives, restorative justice, etc.) to reflect the range of students' interests, diverse post-secondary paths, and social-emotional needs

- The ARPS Family Center implemented the Success after High School group, through which they worked closely with 27 seniors and their families, providing mentoring, workshops on the college application process, and connections within the community. All 27 students were accepted into college, almost all of whom will be the first generation in their family to attend college.
- Our Middle School has engaged in multiple sessions of professional development on Restorative Practices, facilitated by the staff member added midyear. A successful [Restorative Practices program](#) cannot only exist in one specific space, and development activities have focused on infusing this pedagogy in all spaces across the Middle School environment.

Objective F

Upgrade educational and extracurricular facilities to meet the needs of every learner and program.

- The district worked with KMA (accessibility and universal design firm) to complete a review of all district facilities to identify access issues and possible mitigations of those issues. Plans are underway to address these issues to enhance the experience of every student.
- The District engaged in a Master Facilities Use study as supported by the FY19 Capital Plan, forming an [Advisory Board](#) comprised of staff and community members, with representation from all four Regional towns, to guide the work with the appointed consultant, JCJ Architecture. JCJ's completed report took into account their detailed work on the space, operational systems, other external reports (such as the ADA Audit, Athletic Fields study, etc.) to offer the Region a full understanding of both the possibilities and costs of changing the grade configurations of the Middle School and High School, as well as capital needs for coming years.
- Many short-term capital improvements have been made, including repairs to a problematic section of the High School roof; [repairing seats](#) in the Middle School and High School Auditoriums; repairing the [High School Gym Steps](#); and completing the renovations of the High School to allow for [Summit Academy's move](#) to the High School Building in the fall.
- District staff met multiple times with the ARHS Environmental Action Club to assist and advise on reducing our carbon footprint and operating costs, specifically with solar PV. District staff assisted the students in preparing a formal [Project Proposal](#) to submit to State Representative Mindy Domb to bring the Statehouse.

In addition to the district's work on which the Strategic Plan objectives specifically build, there have been a variety of other recent areas of focus and growth for the district:

- The district facilitated an external review of our math program in grades 6-12, providing the consultants with a clear set of guiding questions for the reviewers' consideration, including a focus on the opportunity gap. The consultants provided a detailed report and summary presentation of their findings, and the district has begun a process to change the curricula in grades 6-12 beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, using an aggressive timeline so that the implementation and professional development can occur with all staff, but allowing enough time for staff and community engagement in reviewing the available curricular options. A math intervention teacher and a math position have been added to support the implementation of new curricula in the next school year.
- Through many years of structured and dedicated efforts, the districts' [Tiered Focused Monitoring Report](#), completed by DESE in the areas of special education and civil rights, had no areas of compliance concerns, as compared to four areas of concern during the last full review in 2013. Additionally, the anecdotal feedback from the reviewers indicated that the district's actions were promising in terms of having even further improved student outcomes in the future.
- The district is actively addressing the growing health issue of vaping, including adjusting health courses to include the [Catch curriculum](#), which has been recommended as the most current program on the topic.

Aligning Objectives, Initiatives and Outcomes (May 14, 2019)

Parts I and II of this document contain **draft** objectives, initiatives and outcomes generated by the Strategic Planning Team from their work in the 2018-2019 school year. The Strategic Planning Team was comprised of over 30 volunteers that included parents/guardians, students, staff members, representation from the Amherst-Pelham Education Association, community members, school administrators, and district administrators. The Team developed their work based on multiple data sources: a deep analysis of the results of a survey that went to all stakeholders in the fall; looking at multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources, including academic assessment results and student and staff surveys; their own experiences in ARPS; and the interactive dialogue that occurred over approximately 20 hours of work sessions.

At this point, we are asking the School Committee for feedback, and eventually endorsement, of the Objectives and Outcomes (Part I). Once that is realized, we will further refine and make tangible the initiatives and narrow outcomes for the three schools in the district as well as the Region as a larger entity.

Part I: Connecting objectives and outcomes: The two tables illustrate that each objective ties to at least one outcome, and that each outcome refers to at least one objective.

Objective A Increase and maintain staff diversity to reflect student diversity; increase the number of teaching staff who are people of color <i>Outcomes 1, 3</i>	Objective B Strengthen instructional practices to foster student engagement and connection to teachers and to the school <i>Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5</i>	Objective C Strengthen instructional practice to respond to the cultural identities of students of color while dismantling white supremacy ² in the system, for all students <i>Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5</i>	Objective D Prioritize the emotional wellbeing of students while maintaining high expectations for success <i>Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5</i>	Objective E Widen learning opportunities (e.g., (e.g., STEM electives, restorative justice, etc.) to reflect the range of students' interests, diverse post-secondary paths, and social-emotional needs <i>Outcomes 1, 5</i>	Objective F Upgrade educational and extracurricular facilities to meet the needs of every learner and program. <i>Outcome 4</i>
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Outcome #1 By June 2023, students of color will meet high expectations for achievement, have a healthy self-identity, moving toward eliminating the opportunity gap in our district, as measured by an increase in MCAS scores, AP/honors enrollment and success, college acceptance, ACCESS English language proficiency levels, disparities in special education, and student surveys. <i>Objectives A, B, C, D, E</i>	Outcome #2 Student stressors are minimized, and supports to help students cope with stressors are strengthened, as measured by student feedback, acknowledging that students of color may experience increased stress (anxiety about classroom performance, grade-related pressure) due to institutional racism and oppression. <i>Objectives B, C, D</i>	Outcome #3 Staff members and students interrupt oppression toward protected groups, as measured by surveys, reduced number of bias-based complaints, and reduced referrals related to interpersonal aggression. <i>Objectives A, B, C, D</i>	Outcome #4 By June 2023, in order to strengthen student-centered social-emotional and academic competencies, significant improvements will be seen in the teaching, learning, and extracurricular facilities in terms of sustainability, technology, aesthetics, and accessibility. <i>Objective F</i>	Outcome #5 By June 2023, students are engaged in a wider range of programs to address academic and social-emotional competencies and interests, and diverse post-secondary paths (e.g., STEM electives, restorative justice, etc.), as measured by program offerings and enrollment, and teacher and student surveys. <i>Objectives B, C, D, E</i>
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Part II: Connecting objectives and initiatives: This section provides the **draft** initiatives suggested by the Strategic Planning Team to fulfill the proposed objectives. Note that several initiatives appear in more than one objective by design.

Once Part I of this document is finalized and adopted, more work will be done on the initiatives in the spring and summer. The work below is a summary of the suggestions from the Strategic Planning Team; building and district leaders will take these ideas, as well as others that are solicited from stakeholders, and develop concrete school and district improvement plans to incorporate action steps with measurable goals.

Objective 1: Increase and maintain staff diversity to reflect student diversity; increase the number of teaching staff who are people of color

- 1.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities
- 1.2: Provide professional development related to implicit bias and culturally-responsive instruction (e.g., dismantling racism) to include white people's work on racism
- 1.3: Form alliances with teacher licensure programs, other districts, and educational organizations to lobby the Commonwealth to incentivize entry of candidates of color into the teaching profession (e.g., student loan forgiveness, flexibility of pathways to enter the profession)
- 1.4: Provide mentoring and professional development geared specifically toward teachers of color
- 1.5: Create opportunities for students of color and staff to form affinity groups to support goal setting, mentoring and achievement to ready students to enter the teaching profession

Objective 2: Strengthen instructional and social-emotional practices to foster student engagement and connection to teachers and to the school

- 2.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities
- 2.2: Provide professional development related to implicit bias and culturally-responsive instruction (e.g., dismantling racism) to include white people's work on racism
- 2.3: Provide professional development and other supports to help teachers intentionally build relationships with students
- 2.4: Implement a homework policy that improves students' work-life balance
- 2.5: Create opportunities for groups of students and staff to form academic affinity groups to support goal setting,

- mentoring and achievement (e.g., students of color in STEM courses, etc.)
- 2.6: Develop integrated and culturally-responsive curriculum that is relevant to adolescent learners
- 2.7: Develop consensus and shared understanding among departmental and grade-level faculty members regarding a common language and communal responsibility for teaching cross-curricular skills (e.g., thinking, academic language, post-secondary readiness)
- 2.8: Develop an articulated curriculum and commitment to developing social-emotional skills across the elementary-high school span, with particular attention to the needs of students of color in a system of white supremacy

Objective 3: Strengthen instructional practice (approaches, strategies, materials, assessment, curriculum) to respond to the cultural identities of students of color

- 3.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities
- 3.2: Provide professional development related to implicit bias and culturally-responsive instruction (e.g., dismantling racism) to include white people's work on racism
- 3.3: Develop integrated and culturally-responsive curriculum that is relevant to adolescent learners

Objective 4: Prioritize the emotional wellbeing, along with high expectations for success, while dismantling white supremacy in the infrastructure of the system, for all students

- 4.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities
- 4.2: Provide professional development related to implicit bias and culturally-responsive instruction (e.g., dismantling racism) to include white people's work on racism
- 4.3: Provide professional development and other supports to help teachers intentionally build relationships with students as whole people
- 4.4: Create opportunities for groups of students and staff to form academic affinity groups to support goal setting, mentoring and achievement (e.g., students of color in STEM courses, etc.)
- 4.5: Develop integrated and culturally-responsive curriculum that is relevant to adolescent learners
- 4.6: Develop consensus and shared understanding among departmental and grade-level faculty members regarding a common language and communal responsibility for teaching cross-curricular skills (e.g., thinking, academic language, post-secondary readiness)
- 4.7: Analyze the feasibility of shifting to later start times for ARMS and ARHS

- 4.8: Provide professional development in social-emotional learning, including students' needs related to trauma, anxiety, stress, and depression
- 4.9: Embed trauma-informed and restorative justice practices (circle process in advisory classes)
- 4.10: Identify and address academic and social-emotional needs of students in the transition from elementary school (including conferences with parents/guardians of rising middle schoolers)
- 4.11: Identify students living in poverty in order to identify and address their academic and social-emotional needs
- 4.12: Identify students who do not currently receive the support they need outside of school in order to provide necessary "wraparound" supports
- 4.13: Develop an articulated vision of success for students across the elementary-high school grades relative to academic opportunity and social-emotional wellbeing

Objective 5: Widen learning opportunities (e.g., STEAM electives, problem-based learning, other innovative learning options, restorative justice, mindfulness education) to reflect the range of students' interests, diverse post-secondary paths, and social-emotional needs

- 5.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities
- 5.2: Create opportunities for groups of students and staff to form academic affinity groups to support goal setting, mentoring and achievement beginning in middle school (e.g., students of color in STEM courses, etc.)
- 5.3: Provide a hands-on learning elective course at the Middle School

Objective 6: Upgrade teaching, learning, and extracurricular facilities to meet the needs of all learners and programs

- 6.1: Increase engagement of students and families of color in academic and extracurricular activities by soliciting input related to facility needs and upgrades
- 6.2: Solicit staff input related to facility needs and upgrades
- 6.3: Address accessibility issues to comply with the 2019 ADA audit
- 6.4: Purge outdated technology and implement state-of-the-art technology options