

Educational Program



Amherst Public Schools
March 16, 2016

Amherst Public Schools District Mission

The mission of our schools is to provide all students with a high quality education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural, pluralistic society. We seek to create an environment that achieves equity for all students and ensures that each student is a successful learner, is fully respected, and learns to respect others.



Table of Contents

Amherst Public Schools District Mission.....	1
Guiding Principles.....	3
21 st Century Learning Goals.....	3
Grade & School Configuration Policies	4
Class Size Policies.....	9
School Scheduling Method.....	10
Teaching Methodology and Structure	10
Technology Infrastructure, Policies & Requirements ..	17
Teacher Planning and Room Assignment Policies.....	20
Special Education Programs.....	21
ELL Program.....	24
Transportation Policies.....	24
Lunch Programs	25
Functional Relationships & Key Adjacencies.....	25
Security & Visual Access Requirements.....	27
Acknowledgments	28
Draft Redistricting Maps	28

Guiding Principles

The development of guiding principles for the Wildwood School Project is driven by the notion of creating a school environment where students, teachers and families truly want to be and to engage in teaching and learning. Further, the Wildwood School is a place where students, teachers, families, and community members work towards a common purpose: equitable and high quality educational and social experiences for all students.

Excitement and Engagement

- Students are engaged and excited about their learning
- The learning is authentic, meaningful, and relevant
- All students' needs are met through differentiated approaches
- Students are provided with opportunities to grapple and struggle with new ideas and concepts in effort to foster a growth mindset
- Student voices are heard and learning is visible throughout the school
- Students engage in continual self-assessment

Building Community

- Community-building is a priority within the classroom, across grade levels, within the school, and across the Amherst community
- Students will have a “small school” experience and feel connected and known by peers and adults in the school

Adaptability and Flexibility

- The infrastructure will be flexible and built for the future
- The spaces in the building will support *all* learners to engage in deep thinking and learning
- The building will be green with an eye toward climate justice

Collaboration and Sharing Expertise

- The physical building will support teacher collaboration (i.e., collaborative work spaces and accessible storage of shared materials and resources)
- Teachers will have ample opportunities to share best practices
- Students will learn how to collaborate and there will be ample opportunities to practice teaming skills

21st Century Learning Goals

The following list of priority “21st Century Learning Goals” for Amherst elementary school students were developed by the Educational Working Group (EWG). The EWG represented parents of elementary students, community members and officials, district administrators, and teachers. Five teams of 4-5 participants worked together to create their own set of Learning Goals, after which each team presented to the larger group, with each member subsequently voting on their priority Learning Goals.

Empathy, Citizenship, and Ethics

- Flexibility and community; social and self-awareness

Curiosity, Creativity, and Risk-Taking

- Self-directed learning; imagination

Collaboration

Cultural Awareness and Expression

- Multi-cultural Literacy and Global Awareness

Effective Oral and Written Communication

Grade & School Configuration Policies

Located in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, the Town of Amherst is a diverse, inclusive community offering numerous educational and cultural opportunities. Host to Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the Town enjoys transparent, professional, and high-level government services, quality education, support for open space and agriculture, and respect for its history.

The Amherst Public Schools currently educate approximately 1,200 students in grades PreK-6. More than the vast majority of Massachusetts school districts, our diverse student body reflects state demographic averages.

Race	% of District	% of State
Black / African American	8.6	8.7
Asian	13.9	6.3
Hispanic	20.6	17.9
Native American	0.3	0.2
White	48.7	63.7
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.2	0.1
Multi Race, Non-Hispanic	7.8	3.1
English Language Learners	15.2	8.5
Students with Disabilities	17.6	17.1
Free & Reduced Lunch	41.2	38.3

Currently, district students are educated in three K-6 elementary schools: Fort River, Wildwood, and Crocker Farm which also houses five integrated preschool classrooms for students throughout the town. The infrastructure of the three schools differs significantly. While Crocker Farm is the oldest, a renovation/addition completed in 2002 makes this school an excellent space for teaching and learning. By contrast, Wildwood and Fort River, built in 1970 and 1973, respectively, have many educational and infrastructure challenges that affect teaching and learning. Built as “open classrooms,” noise issues led to the erection of partial walls, resulting in the current “quad” set-up, with each quad comprised of four classrooms sharing a boys’ and a girls’ bathroom. Unfortunately, since the walls do not extend to the ceiling, noise from one classroom easily reaches another. Additionally, serious moisture issues are pervasive at both schools, with staff members and parents/guardians expressing concerns about indoor air quality.

The stark differences between the learning environments of these three schools can be seen in teachers’ responses to selected items from the 2014 statewide Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) survey. In response to “The physical environment of classrooms in this school supports teaching and learning”:

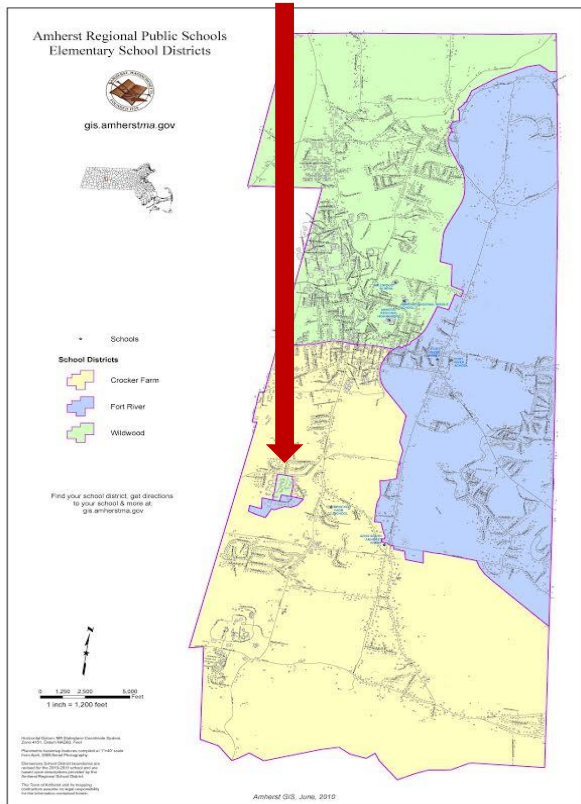
- 96% of Crocker Farm teachers agreed
- 24% of Wildwood teachers agreed
- 9% of Fort River teachers agreed (ranking 990th out of 992 Massachusetts schools that completed the survey)
- 83% of Massachusetts elementary school teachers agreed

In response to “Teachers and staff work in a school that is environmentally healthy”:

- 87% of Crocker Farm teachers agreed
- 25% of Wildwood teachers agreed
- 18% of Fort River teachers agreed
- 72% of Massachusetts elementary school teachers agreed

In 2010, the district closed Mark’s Meadow School (another K-6 elementary school), redistricting the entire town to the remaining three schools, which resulted in more than 40% of students transferring schools. The new attendance zones were created to normalize the population of income-eligible students across the three schools, in response to the School Committee’s desire to have equitable schools across the district. However, in achieving socioeconomic equity, the map of attendance zones did not prioritize geographic distance from schools for some students (see map below). Therefore, many

students living in apartments on East Hadley Road now attend different elementary schools than do their neighbors in an adjacent complex.



For a few years after the redistricting, the percentages of income-eligible students remained fairly consistent across the three schools. In the past two years, however, these percentages have shifted, with Crocker Farm now at 35%, Fort River at 44%, and Wildwood at 43%. We have also seen a shift in the overall student population at these three schools. While Crocker Farm is on the verge of being over-enrolled and Wildwood’s enrollment is relatively stable, Fort River is now under-enrolled (see table below) due to a consistent decline in students over the past 10 years. Based on current projections gathered from rolling forward current classes along with census data for younger students, we expect these trends to continue.

	FY '08	FY '09	FY '10	FY '11	FY '12	FY '13	FY '14	FY '15	FY '16
WW Resident	416	403	368	471	440	426	402	394	401
WW Choice						6	5	18	24
FR Resident	476	458	434	400	391	357	345	346	333
FR Choice						19	23	20	14
CF Resident	322	331	341	371	383	394	421	407	404
CF Choice						4	14	15	13

Another challenge with the district's existing organization is that it does not allow for ongoing inter-school collaboration. Teachers spend roughly six hours each school year collaborating on curriculum and instruction with colleagues from other schools. Given our district Theory of Action, which states, "If all teachers engage in an ongoing cycle of disciplined collaboration, focused on the examination and continuous improvement of student learning and instructional practice, engagement and achievement will increase for all students," the current model is woefully inadequate in this area. Innovations and creative ideas at one school do not have a consistent vehicle to transfer to the other two schools, hampering not only district growth but also implementation of district initiatives.

Also, relevant to grade level configuration is the movement towards project-based, authentic learning as a cornerstone of our district identity. To increase student engagement and help students see how content relates to the real world, we are partnering with Expeditionary Learning, a national organization with its Northeast Regional Headquarters located in Amherst. As part of this initiative, many teachers are reading *Leaders of Their Own Learning*, a text that describes how non-standardized assessment can be used in authentic ways that influence teaching and learning and improve the student experience. One key principle of this education philosophy is that learning is an active endeavor, with students working on projects both individually and in small groups, a practice which requires multiple work-stations and flexible classroom configurations. Unfortunately, this type of project-based learning cannot be properly implemented at either Wildwood or Fort River, where the lack of acoustic privacy and breakout rooms make it quite difficult for students to work in groups without distracting each other.

These are not the only challenges at Wildwood and Fort River. Both sites have accessibility issues for students and adults with mobility challenges. For instance, to reach the bathroom, students in the "interior" quad classrooms must walk through one or two "exterior" quad classrooms. Besides being problematic for students with mobility challenges, this is disruptive to learning and also takes up physical classroom space, since walking lanes need to be maintained for traffic flow to the bathrooms. Another challenge is the placement/location of the school libraries, which are open to two major hallway areas and are adjacent to the instrumental music rooms, which generate significant noise. Limited natural light is present in the interior quad areas and none exists in many of the breakout rooms where students receive Title I and Special Education services.

Our district has recently seen a significant increase in ELL students with little to no English speaking skills, from 5 two years ago to 33 currently, primarily due to programs at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. While we would like to create an "ELL Newcomer" program, these students are currently spread across our three schools, so no grade level at any school has enough students in this category to merit creating this program. Although we try to teach these students as best we can while also maintaining our commitment to all ELL students — including those who are progressing in their language development — these two distinct ELL populations require distinct instructional models, which are difficult to balance for our dedicated ELL teachers.

Listed below are advantages to transitioning the district to a two-school model, with all Preschool-1st grade students attending Crocker Farm and all 2nd through 6th grade students attending the building that results from this project:

- Ensure that every classroom has an appropriate space for active, engaged student learning that aligns with our philosophy of education and equity
- Ensure that every learning environment is appropriate for all students, including those with special needs and/or ELL students (both of whom are often the most vulnerable to learning environments that have frequent noise or movement distractions)
- Ensure that regular collaboration between groups of educators with similar positions can occur on a consistent basis so that best practices can be shared and transferred to multiple classrooms, providing a similar experience for all students
- Ensure that all students, regardless of disabilities or mobility challenges, are able to attend an ADA-compliant school
- Develop a system that guarantees socioeconomic equity for all schools without subdividing Section 8 housing complexes to achieve this goal
- Provide annual operational savings that can be used to either increase programming in the school and/or reduce the cost of our district to the town
- Ensure a newcomer ELL program could be developed in a cost-neutral way, since all similarly-aged students who would benefit from this program would attend the same school
- Stabilize the variability of the enrollment in our schools
- Develop an early childhood center, with a program focused solely on young children, particularly in the areas of social-emotional connections and early literacy
- Close two outdated elementary schools that no longer support the form of education that is consistent with student needs in the 21st century and that have significant mold and air quality issues

Given that a grades 2-6 building would be larger than any of our current schools, the school could be separated into two distinct wings, each with its own administrative, teaching, and mental health teams. The initial community feedback placed significant value on students feeling connected to a smaller group of children and adults; this organization of the intermediate school will be able to provide that experience. The school would not only benefit from the economies of scale that occur with a larger building, such as shared spaces for the library, makerspace, and physical education and shared custodial staff, but would also allow for collaboration between the two wings, while maintaining the small school experience valued by students, staff, and parents/guardians. The projected student enrollment of this school would be 750, consistent with the MSBA's guidance.

The district has already come up with multiple ways to define the district's catchment area into two zones (as compared to the three now). The key defining criteria were: socioeconomic equity maintaining neighborhoods in the same zone. The benefit to this approach is that if, in the future, enrollment shifts and redistricting was needed to balance socioeconomic equity, the district could redraw boundaries without changing which building any student attends and it could be done gradually over time since all students at a given grade level would be attending the same building. Examples of the maps that were developed are attached at the end of this document. We recommended that the Amherst School Committee make the determination about the zones in 2018, two years

prior to the consolidation, to give enough time for community input into the process and leaving enough time to work out final transportation routes.

The Amherst School Committee has a policy on Open Enrollment (Policy JFBA), but it was suspended on September 26, 2011 and no discussions about reopening the policy have occurred.

Crocker Farm's enrollment would drop from its current 415 students to 350 students, resolving the overcrowding issues while allowing for additional early childhood classroom spaces. We currently have five preschool classrooms that serve the entire Amherst community at Crocker Farm, which does not meet the needs of the community based on the wait list for the program. This model will allow us to add two additional preschool classrooms, primarily focused on providing early learning experiences for our low-income student population where cost and transportation are often barriers to enrollment. The district has engaged LEARN, a regional collaborative with expertise in early childhood education, to facilitate visioning work with teachers, parents/guardians, and administrators for the reconfigured early childhood center so that its own unique identity can be formed. This professional development is starting in April and will include teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and community partners to develop a vision for the early childhood center as well as take a visit to a successful early childhood center that is not far from Amherst. In addition, the district is developing a cohesive professional development plan to support staff members in moving towards a project-based model. This work has already started and will be ongoing.

In terms of the student and family transitions, we have experience with supporting these groups. As noted above, in 2010, the district closed one school (Mark's Meadow) and redistricted the rest of the town, resulting in 40% of students attending a different elementary school than they had the prior year. Through additional Open Houses, school visits, student buddy systems, ensuring that all students had familiar staff faces in their new school, and parent information nights, the changes went incredibly smoothly. We would plan to use a similar system in years leading up to the reconfiguration in 2020 to ameliorate any challenges that the transition would bring. Additionally, the way that the town would be split into two enrollment districts that maintain neighborhoods to stay together would ensure that the vast majority of students would be familiar with many of their classmates in the new model.

On January 19, 2016, the Amherst School Committee, by the count of 4-1, voted this grade reconfiguration and the closing of an elementary school. The building that would be vacated would be returned to the Town of Amherst for its use. The district has created draft maps for the redistricting that would be required under this plan and presented them to the Amherst School Committee in December, 2015; given that enrollment shifts in the community, a recommendation was made to the School Community would be to vote on a new enrollment map two years prior to the reconfiguration, likely in the fall of 2018, when enrollment information is most current.

To summarize the process that led to this vote, through many discussions through the fall, the preferred solution emerged a way to address structural inequities in the district while maintaining long-term relationships with students and their schools.

The structural inequities that are addressed in the preferred option are (they also would be benefits under a model where two schools would be organized by grade level): Students in our specialized special education programs would be able to remain in their neighborhood school to receive the services they require for full access to the curriculum. In the new building, each program would have a dedicated room, but students could attend their “home” school when integrated into the general education classroom since all students are in the same building and the programs would service students from both wings. We would be able to create an ELL Newcomers center that would address the learning needs of Level 1 ELL students from both wings. We are unable to do this currently, but the economies of scale granted by the new building would make this possible. We saw a similar model working well in Acton, MA when we did a site visit there. We could maintain socioeconomic equity between the wings without the current model of creating “low-income islands” where students are bussed outside their enrollment zone to equalize poverty rates in the new school (this is discussed in further detail below)

As opposed to the grade level wing configuration (2-3, 4-6), the grade 2-6 configuration allows for a five year relationship to be formed between students, teacher teams, specialists, and administrators. Through multiple engagement sessions, there was a value placed on not adding two additional transitions to the student experience, so the preferred option was chosen over one that involved having three transitions for students in their elementary careers.

Finally, our current 6th grade has a distinct program from the other grade levels in the elementary schools. Teachers departmentalize into content areas given the age of students and the complexity of the curriculum. The schedule is also different from other grade levels, with more time for science and social studies and less time for literacy. Having the sixth grade classrooms clustered together offers many possibilities for grouping and collaboration. Given that the sixth graders will all be together in the Regional Middle School the following year, having a transition year with more interaction between 6th graders from each wings would be beneficial. Being in close proximity to the makerspace also would allow for better use of the extended science blocks that these classes have in their schedule.

Class Size Policies

The Amherst School Committee recognizes the relationship between class size, effective teaching, and student achievement and that this relationship varies across grade levels, among subjects and by methods of instruction. Class sizes that rise above acceptable levels affect both educational quality and the School District’s ability to attract and retain the best possible teachers. Therefore, class size will be determined by several variables including grade level, subject area, particular needs of the pupils in the classroom, nature of the learning objectives, availability of classroom space, instructional methods, availability of support staff, and budgetary constraints.

The annual guidelines for Elementary School class sizes will specify the range in class size for each grade. The District’s preferred ranges for Elementary School class sizes are as follows:

Kindergarten and First Grade - 17 to 21 students

Second and Third Grades - 19 to 23 students
 Fourth through Sixth Grades - 20 to 24 students

The School Committee recognizes that the annual guidelines for Elementary School class sizes (and actual class sizes) may be different from these preferred ranges; however, the goal for the class size guidelines will be to keep Elementary School class sizes as low as possible within these preferred ranges, particularly in the youngest grades.

In addition, the district has recently implemented a co-teaching special education model at all of the elementary schools. The class size of co-taught classrooms is slightly less than in other classes to best accommodate students with special needs and leave room for students with special needs who may enroll after the beginning of the school year.

School Scheduling Method

The Amherst Public Schools have developed a schedule to design sufficient time for each core content area while maintaining a whole child approach, recognizing the value that social-emotional instruction, specials, and recess have for elementary students. In addition, we provide contractual preparation time for all professional staff members. The current weekly time allotments are as follows:

<i>Literacy: 550-700 minutes</i>	<i>Instrumental Music (option for older elementary students): 75 minutes</i>
<i>Mathematics: 300-350 minutes</i>	<i>Physical Education, Health, and Wellness: 60 minutes</i>
<i>Science/Tech/Engineering: 90-120 minutes</i>	<i>Instructional Technology: 40 minutes</i>
<i>Social Studies: 90-120 minutes</i>	<i>Library: 40 minutes</i>
<i>Social Curriculum: 50-100 minutes</i>	<i>Integrated Arts (grades 5 & 6): 40 minutes</i>
<i>Art: 40 minutes</i>	
<i>Music: 40 minutes</i>	

The Amherst School Committee supports the provision of an adequate number of specials teachers in the district. These programs support the commitment the community holds to provide a well-rounded program of studies to elementary students. The specialists have additional hours beyond their specials teaching responsibilities to integrate with classroom teachers and other staff members to provide an integrated approach to teaching and learning. While this is a formal part of the schedule for students in grades 5-6, the integrated arts is occurring across all grade levels.

The instrumental music program is robust. Strings lessons are available in 3rd grade and wind lessons are available starting in 4th grade. Finding space for both the small group lessons as well as the ensembles is a significant challenge. It is not currently possible to schedule enough small group rooms to accommodate the needs of the program, so entryways into teacher work rooms are used for these lessons. More information about the space needs of arts programs can be found below in the Teaching Methodology and Structure section.

If the World Language program is reintroduced into the district, time allotments will likely shift to accommodate this priority.

The common spaces in this plan are the library/makerspace and the gymnasium. The gymnasium would have netting that separates the space into two sides, so two classes can have physical education at the same time, which we saw in Acton, MA. We would schedule the classes in such a way that this would not be a common experience. We would have two physical education teachers. In a similar way, the library and makerspace would be scheduled in a way that reduces the likelihood that either wing would be using the spaces at the same time. In terms of budgets, curriculum lines are set and managed by the district office; there would be no change to current practices.

Teaching Methodology and Structure

Below is an overview of the general elementary curriculum and methods used by our talented staff members.

Math

The Amherst Elementary Math program consistently provides opportunities to engage and challenge all students through the use of multiple modalities while supporting a model of growth mindset. To implement the 2011 Massachusetts State Frameworks, teachers have access to and use Everyday Math, Drexel open response problems, number talks, and technology. Teachers help students to lead math congresses and to share mathematical ideas and thinking.

To set the stage for this work, the district has employed three math coaches charged with working with grade level teams on a two week rotation throughout the year. On week one the coach visits each classroom during math instruction supporting class lessons and gathering student work. On week two, the coach facilitates a meeting with grade level teachers and special education teachers.

In the math team meeting, educators discuss state standards and how to engage all students. By starting with the state standard, the team can decide the learning target of the lesson. By assessing student work, the team can then focus on differentiating benchmarks to meet the needs of diverse learners within the student-centered classroom. The team looks at the work offered in the lesson and thinks about the cognitive demand presented in each task. The goal is to provide material that has the types and level of thinking required of students in order to successfully engage with and solve a task. The objective of each lesson is to present students with a variety of experiences in math class where tasks consistently encourage high-level student thinking, synthesis and application. Teachers choose tasks that will engage students in a productive struggle, but yet are attainable. Additionally, these tasks also provide opportunities for student reflection and additional opportunities for learning.

To encourage teachers in their own professional development with Growth Mindset, High Cognitive Demand, and the Standards, the math coaches are leading grades 3-6 in three half-day math labs. For each lab, teachers are given time to explore and creatively plan a math lesson. This design encourages collaboration and team growth within grade levels and the ability to share best practices.

To give every student the opportunity to access in-class activities teachers develop a well-rounded math curriculum. This includes opportunities for numeracy work, core instruction, practice activities, extension activities, small group work, partner work, math projects and the use of spiral reviews. To foster the mathematical practice standards, teachers lead students in computational and conceptual conversations that stress problem solving, the use of multiple representations through mathematical modeling, and sharing of their ideas. Teachers differentiate lessons by addressing the gaps in student learning and offering adjusted activities that provide an enhanced study of the math concepts. For students who have been identified with intervention needs, a math enhancement block is available daily. Students with IEPs have their needs met with a combination of co-teaching and pullout services to support their learning.

Amherst elementary teachers are striving to create a culture of mathematicians who have the wherewithal to think through complex problems, to engage in a cycle of inquiry, and to persevere through a challenge when the answers do not come quickly. As educators engage in a collaborative process with student mathematicians, they strive to nurture lifelong habits of successful math learners. Those habits develop the ability to reason about problems, to offer different perspectives, to construct and justify arguments, as well as to have an internal awareness of when an answer does not make sense. The students as well as educators are committed to these overarching learning targets every day and work towards creating a math environment where there are opportunities for growth, understanding, rigor and shared achievements.

Literacy

Based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the English Language Arts Program serves to help all children develop communication skills in writing and reading to develop a lifelong interest in literacy. Using a balanced, multi-faceted approach to literacy instruction, teachers integrate direct instruction with authentic reading and writing experiences so that students learn how to use literacy strategies and skills and have opportunities to apply what they are learning. Teachers strive to find balance for every child by being flexible and selecting appropriate strategies based on their individual needs. Students receive at least 90 minutes of daily instruction in ELA.

Through a balanced approach that includes instruction using the reading and writing workshop model, explicit phonics instruction, and word study, students develop:

- Phonemic and phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge
- Alphabetic knowledge, blending, sound/symbol correspondence, structural analysis, contextual clues, and high frequency words
- Comprehension strategies in order to evaluate, synthesize, analyze, connect, infer and inquire
- Vocabulary
- Process writing, spelling, and grammar

In addition, students read both orally and silently and are read to from a variety of high quality increasingly complex fiction and nonfiction texts at both independent and instructional levels. Students participate in small group instruction and read a variety of reading materials from trade books, leveled books with controlled vocabulary, and decodable books. Students write daily to

support and extend their knowledge of the structure of language and construct meaning. Technology is incorporated into the ELA classroom to support the reading and writing process, including iPads for younger students working on phonemic awareness.

Formal and ongoing informal assessments such as The Benchmark Assessment System, spelling inventories, and phonemic inventories allow teachers and specialists to intervene early with appropriate instruction to students who are not progressing. Grade level data meetings are held twice a year to examine student data and identify students in need of Tier 1 and 2 interventions. Students receive Tier 2 targeted literacy interventions during a 30 minute Enhancement block. Interventionists use Aimsweb assessments to monitor student progress. We use a wide range of Tier 2 interventions that are based on students' specific learning profiles.

Science

The elementary (K-6) science curriculum used in the Amherst Public Schools was designed to align with the 2001 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Standards and is undergoing revision and realignment to better correlate with the 2013 Draft Revised MA STE Standards. These updated standards are based on the Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize authentic inquiry and hands-on learning, including: asking questions, defining problems, developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data, using mathematics and computational thinking, and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

Most units of study used in the district are kit-based. These kits are kept in large bins and need to be stored out of the way of the instructional area, in a designated and securable space. Science instruction at all levels requires access to water (as both a scientific "supply" and for the purposes of clean up and health/safety), so convenient access to sinks is essential. Due to the use of liquids in hands-on investigations, activities, and demonstrations, waterproof (non-carpeted), nonslip floor surfaces are important, especially in areas of the room where science activities will take place (e.g., flooring materials, some of which are not adequate for proper science instruction. Many science investigations also require workspaces larger than the traditional-sized student desks found in most classrooms. Large, seamless desktops/workspaces are strongly preferred to minimize dropping and spilling of supplies, to facilitate ease of producing handwritten work, and to facilitate student collaboration. Set up and use of science materials/equipment at countertops or other large, seamless work spaces is preferred but limited due to current instructional facilities. Lastly, the district is committed to making science learning experiences accessible to every student. This takes the form of differentiation of materials as well as the use of appropriate accommodating equipment, furniture, and the like.

A makerspace that would provide an additional instructional room to support students' use of materials and interactions with the science curriculum would support student engagement in the sciences. Makerspaces, whether focusing on STEM, STEM, robotics, science, or making, are effective, because they bring students to the foreground and gives them a chance to be creative instead of forcing them to learn specific concepts in specific ways like handouts. They are playgrounds for future designers and scientists. Makerspaces develop problem solving skills, the scientific process, and creativity more than typical classrooms. They provide hands-on project-based learning with minimal teacher intrusion and more potential for self-directed learning. A

makerspace covers a multitude of skills and subjects, but it takes materials and good teachers to make it flourish.

Designating a classroom as a makerspace is an important component in establishing a healthy, vibrant, tenable makerspace program. First, makerspaces are full of materials--from high-tech pieces of equipment like 3-D printers and robots, to low-tech items like recycled household items--and these require space for both use and storage. In order for a makerspace to function well, students must have easy access to the supplies they need, and they must be given adequate space in which to work. This enables greater exploration of the materials and decreases safety concerns related to crowding. Makerspace materials include items of high monetary value, as well as those to which students should not have access without a teacher's supervision, and a designated makerspace ensures that there can be a location where such materials are stored in a secure manner. The physical makerspace itself should encourage creative thinking and tinkering, and these are hampered when students lack elbow room to explore in an open-ended way. An inviting, effective makerspace should have ample countertops, standing tables, traditional tables, non-traffic floor space, and a connection to the outdoors (visual and/or physical) which allow students to explore the materials in a meaningful way.

Safety is always a concern when working at a school. The makerspace will not be more hazardous than a classroom or an art room unless there will be more advanced components like 3D printers, CNC routers, and laser cutting machines. If those will be added, then there can be a corner for them with the option to section them off from the rest of the room if a staff member is not able to directly supervise. Since it's an elementary school, I do not advise students to have access to those devices, at least while they are in use.

Staff will have to be trained how to use the equipment and specific safety rules should be in place like wear goggles when operating, never touch a machine, and always have a staff member helping you. For the majority of the equipment like robotics and engineering materials, the safety concern is extremely low.

The elementary science curriculum incorporates two outdoor components. The first of these is outdoor garden beds. There are approximately two garden beds per grade level at each school, and each school has an outdoor shed equipped with hoses, shovels, and other tools for use in the gardens. At present, some teachers use the garden to plant seeds and observe plant growth in connection with related units of study. The garden curriculum is currently under development, with the goal of creating hands-on lessons and activities that capitalize on the connections between garden-related content and the state learning standards for each grade level. The second outdoor component involves visual and physical connection to the natural world. The visual connection (allowing for daily observations of the outdoors regardless of weather conditions/season) is made possible by the placement of numerous windows in instructional spaces. The physical connection is facilitated by easy access to the outdoors via conveniently located doors, and allows students and teachers the opportunity to engage in scientific thinking and skills practice in an authentic, engaging, and relevant manner.

Social Studies

Students engage in a history/social sciences curriculum that wherever possible integrates with the informational skills components to support the development of analytic thinking and application skills. It is important that there is wall space available for maps and educational posters/displays as well as ample storage capacity for books and other content materials. We also integrate the arts into this content area; for example, the Enchanted Circle Theater, a local organization, collaborates with teachers to infuse the arts into 5th grade Social Studies, which promotes learning and engagement. The concept of social justice, while taught across content areas, is particularly connected to social studies. Ensuring that history is studied through multiple perspectives with a focus on multicultural content and pedagogy is a critical element of our program.

Social/Emotional Learning

We utilize multiple tools to ensure that students are supported in the social/emotional realm. Second Step is our core curriculum used for teaching social emotional skills. We employ a tiered model of support and core values to promote positive behavior in all contexts of our school. In addition, many classrooms use the Zones of Regulation program and other Sensory Smart tools that might influence how we design learning spaces that can support all learners in this domain.

World Language

The Amherst Public Schools previous had a World Language Program at the elementary level. The School Committee passed a policy (IHAH) in 2010 to introduce this program to our schools. They wrote, “This policy is in line with the Amherst Elementary School District goals of academic achievement, social justice, and the preparation and encouragement of every student to become a participating, responsible citizen within a global society. Spanish is currently by far the most often non-English language spoken in the homes of Amherst Elementary School children, and therefore Spanish is the language that provides the best opportunity to meet these goals.”

While the program was enjoyed by students, it had staff split between the three schools to cover the instruction, which led to significant scheduling challenges that prevented the programs from fully realizing its potential. The World Language policy was suspended due to a budget shortfall in 2013. If operational savings occur from the result of this building project, exploring the restoration of this program is a priority.

The Integrated Arts

Over the past few years, the Amherst Integrated Arts Initiative has been a critical part of the work of the district. It is our belief that the arts play a central role in the education of our students. In a collaborative process, our specialist team developed a definition and foundational goals for the initiative:

The Amherst Integrated Arts Initiative* is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through interdisciplinary experiences. Students engage in a creative process that connects multiple disciplines and meets evolving objectives through these experiences.

**This includes visual, literary, performing, movement/kinesthetic, and the technical arts*

Common Threads in Arts Integration

- Collaborative Work
- Community Building
- Creative Process
- Equity and Empowerment
- Skill Development
- Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Foundational Learning Goals for AIAI:

- Students and teachers regularly engage in exciting collaborative learning experiences
- The initiative offers opportunities for building community and enriching students' lives in and beyond school
- Students and teachers consciously develop their personal creative process through regular practice
- The initiative promotes equity by honoring and celebrating our diverse community to inspire and empower students
- Students will have opportunities to develop and practice skills in discrete disciplines, including the visual, performing, movement/kinesthetic, literary and technology arts
- Students and teachers have opportunities to engage in meaningful interdisciplinary work.

Art Program

Students in kindergarten through 6th grade receive 40 minute art sessions once per week. Additionally, students in 5th and 6th grades have weekly Arts Immersion classes, a choice-based district-wide initiative to provide students with an immersive and interdisciplinary experience in each of the Specials areas.

Currently, the art room has ample space for a maximum of 24 students to discover, plan, and create art. Advantages currently include proper separation between workspaces and storage spaces, natural light, and placement of the art room near the main entrance of the school. The room has a large storage closet, a poorly-ventilated kiln, and ample but inefficiently structured shelving and closet units. The sliding doors of the closets are heavy and dangerous for small children to use.

New or renovated art rooms must be equipped to provide all students with a rigorous, varied, and exciting art education in a variety of high-quality media and with many possibilities for interdisciplinary connection. Ample storage spaces must be provided for flat works on paper or canvas as well as three-dimensional mixed-media sculpture. A clay storage area and well-ventilated kiln and glazing area are required, separate from the areas storing paper or flammable liquids. The room must have ample natural light as well as wall space for a projector, whiteboard, and many bulletin board surfaces for displaying exemplary student work and additional relevant works of art. Sinks of varying height (suited to a variety of age ranges) must be provided - four sinks would be ideal. Cabinets, countertops, drying racks, and storage cubbies must be provided to store the work of hundreds of students as well as all of the supplies to serve

the whole school. Any art room must also have ample storage space in its own large storage closet with shelving (metal is safest), sturdy work tables, large storage closets, teacher preparation areas, class meeting spaces with a whiteboard and projector or smartboard, an area for several computers with internet access, a printer, and plenty of natural light. Ideally, each classroom would also have a door to the outside for outdoor art activities.

In the event that we design two art rooms (this would be necessary only under the reconfiguration option), our students would be well-served by two differentiated art spaces: one for two-dimensional media and one for three-dimensional media, placed close to one another for maximum collaboration between the two art teachers and for collaborative or mixed-media projects. The two-dimensional art room would require many wide, short shelves or drawers for storing flat work, as well as sturdy shelves for holding bottles of paint. Depending on curricular interests, this room might also house a graphic design area, which must be in a separate area from the painting and printmaking supplies. The three-dimensional art room would require an exceptionally large set of storage cubbies/cabinet areas within the classroom itself (in addition to its storage closet) to store student work. There must be a clay area, a well-ventilated kiln and glaze area, a plaster area, and a wide, flat shelving unit for storing sketches and plans for three-dimensional projects. The three-dimensional room would be used for exploring ceramics, wire and metal sculpture, mixed-media, papier-mâché, plaster, wood, carving, mosaics, fiber arts (including knitting, weaving, batik, sewing, and quilting). The two-dimensional room would be used for exploring drawing in many media (pencil, charcoal, oil pastel, crayon, etc.), painting (several types), printmaking, collage, cartooning, animation, illustration, and graphic design and/or photography.

Currently, the art teacher experiences limitations in being able to adequately display the many wonderful assignments that students create. While there is some display area in the hallway, the outdated nature of the two small cabinets and multiple bulletin boards do not draw proper attention to the projects. Therefore, ample display areas for both two- and three-dimensional student work is needed. These display spaces should be in hallways, in the lobby, offices, and in other central and community areas throughout the school. These should be lockable, easy to clean, and well-lit.

Another distinct element of the art program is that art specialists collaborate with grade level teachers to integrate curricular standards with creative endeavors. For example, when the 3rd graders study the Wampanoag, the art and grade level teachers present various visual models of these historic dwellings. Then, the art teacher guides students through the process of creating their own wetu. Another grade level studies animal adaptations; the art teacher works with students to create diorama models that include habitat as well as clay animals of their chosen animal. These displays are part of a celebration in which parents are invited.

Finally, the arts rooms need to be fully wired for technology to support student learning in this domain.

Physical Education Program

Students have a 40 minute physical education session each week. A primary goal of the program is to promote our students to become active people throughout the lives; therefore, students are

exposed to many different activities so they can find many that they enjoy. There is a mix of team sports and fitness activities throughout the program. Younger students learn core skills to enable greater participation in team and collaborative games. Older students learn about how to position themselves in space during a game, how to move to the correct spot, and the strategy used to achieve a goal. Team activities are included throughout to support the social aspects of physical education. The physical education teachers also work with small groups of students (often students with special needs) in addition to the weekly classes to support their success in the physical education curriculum and their ability to participate in games at recess and in the community.

Ideal space in a new school would include a traversing wall to allow for more gross motor activities without needing to use belays. In addition, the ability to divide the gym would allow for concurrent activities to occur during inclement weather.

Music / Performing Arts Programs

Students have a 40 minute classroom music session each week. The program has many components that enrich the lives of students and the school community. At its core, the classes feature large group activities where students learn to work together, play instruments, and engage in song and dance. In addition, a social curriculum is integrated into the program. Cultural diversity is featured through the music that is chosen. An aim is to ensure that students become culturally literate in the musical traditions from around the world.

The mechanics of music, such as music theory and the ability to read and play notes and rhythms, is another core feature of the program. The program is inclusive for all students, including those with intensive special needs.

Current challenges include a music room with poor acoustic spaces at Wildwood. In addition, the music program involves many movement activities, so the size of the space is particularly important. The music program also integrates into classroom activities through the year.

Amherst also has a robust instrumental music program. Students have an opportunity to learn string instruments in 3rd grade and wind instruments starting in 4th grade. There are small group lessons and large ensembles that meet weekly to support student development and provide an experience in musical performance. Finding sufficient small group rooms for lessons is a particular challenge.

The music programs contribute to the community in the school. At assemblies, graduations, and other events, aspects of the programs are integral to bring the community together. Parents/guardians typically enjoy seeing the performances that their students participate in throughout the school year. A large space for performances, such as a cafetorium, is a particular need.

Technology Infrastructure, Instruction Policies & Program Requirements Labs, Classrooms, Library (Media Center, etc.)

Wildwood School currently has a robust, though multi-generational, technology infrastructure. The district has long recognized the impact technology can have on education and has provided

what resources it can to support that vision. Technology currently at Wildwood is summarized as follows:

Infrastructure:

All classrooms are currently wired with Cat 5 ethernet. Unfortunately, the bulk of the wiring was installed before 1998. The majority of classrooms have only a single cluster of 6 drops. This wiring is beginning to show its age, with an increasing number of failures, either due to wiring issues, or failing or damaged jacks. The Ortronics wall plates and jacks used are proprietary and don't use the keystone standard. This limits options when repairing failed jacks. It is often necessary replace the entire faceplate and all 6 jacks with standard replacements. The single location also limits classroom layout. When multiple locations are desired, either additional drops need to be installed, or existing runs are pulled back and relocated. All drops were wired back to the "book room" closet, the MDF, which contains a rack, patch panels, a UPS and switches.

During the summer of 2012, when implementing a district-wide, standardized IP phone system, the Information Systems department, with the assistance of the maintenance department, created two additional wiring closets, or IDF. A wall mounted cabinet was installed containing a UPS, patch panel and switch. Intercom handsets were replaced with IP telephones, which required installation of a Cat 5e network drop. At that time, two additional Cat 5e drops were added below the phone location to provide additional flexibility.

All the current switches are capable of providing some 802.11af or 802.11at power over Ethernet. Many locations currently prove extremely challenging to add or replace network cabling due to building design.

Prior to the summer of 2012, the wireless infrastructure for the schools was inconsistent and provided incomplete, spotty coverage. Wireless access points were consumer grade devices which required individual management. In 2012, the Information Systems Department implemented a system-wide enterprise grade wireless infrastructure. The technology at that time was 802.11n and supported both 2.4 and 5 GHz radios. Access points were placed to provide almost complete coverage to the building. During the summer of 2015, some of the 802.11n access points were replaced with 3x3 802.11ac access points to support newer technology, higher speeds and greater density.

The network operating system is Windows-based utilizing Active Directory. Most of the servers reside in the nearby Middle School, with additional servers at both the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School and Pelham Elementary. Users can login to any computer at any building in the district. The Middle School and Wildwood are connected via private underground fiber. There are currently 12 strands of multimode cable and 6 strands of single mode. The single mode cable is currently being used to provide a gigabit connection between locations.

Classroom Instructional Technology

Almost all grade-level classrooms offer the following instructional technology:

- 1-2 modern (<5 year old) desktop computers per classroom for student/staff use running Windows 7

- Digital projector
- Document camera
- At the teacher's request, a Mimio Teach Interactive solution is provided

Additionally, teachers were given the option of replacing a desktop computer with a laptop for their use. District-wide, more than 70% of the teachers have chosen this option.

Networked laser printers are placed strategically in the quads and shared among classrooms. There are also larger capacity network laser printers in both the library and computer laboratory. There is a networked color laser printer in the computer lab. The district employs two simple devices that allow any printer to support Airprint and Google cloud print to support iOS, Chrome and Android Devices.

Mobile Technology

Chromebook carts were installed during the summer of 2015 in every 4th-6th grade classroom. All 3rd-6th grade students received both network and Google Apps for Education accounts. There are currently 4 mobile carts containing 25 modern laptops each shared among classrooms and the library. There is also a 20 unit mobile cart containing 20 modern laptops for use by special education programs. There is a 25 unit iPad cart containing iPad 2s available for use by any classroom or program. There are 2 iPads assigned to each K-2 classroom. A number of special education staff have iPads assigned for use with students. ELL teachers will receive iPads before the end of October 2015.

Library

The library contains 11 modern computers, 1 used for check out, the remainder for student and staff use. There is a shared network laser printer in the library. A SmartBoard interactive whiteboard and projector are available and utilized in one corner of the library. The layout of the library severely limits its utility. It is open on three sides with multiple means of ingress and egress. The limited wall space means limited available electrical outlets and network drops. No walls means all traffic in the main hallways bordering the long sides of the library is distracting and disruptive to instruction. Students access the library for weekly 40 minute specials classes as well throughout the day to select and return books and to work on integrated projects with classroom teachers. The librarians also work with the technology teachers and classroom teachers on integrated projects as part of the arts integration initiative.

Computer Lab

The lab is equipped with 25 current generation desktops. The teacher station is connected to a data projector, document camera and interactive whiteboard. Two shared network printers are located in the lab, one black and white and one color. Unused mobile carts are stored in the lab, leading to a cramped, crowded space. The lab was created by combining two small adjacent instructional spaces. The dividing wall was demolished to approximately 3 feet. Raceway was installed around the perimeter of the two sections containing power and network cabling. Unfortunately no changes were made to the HVAC system to accommodate the 25 computers, monitors, people, printers and projector, so the space can become uncomfortably hot. The lab was originally designed as a Television Studio, so there is still a large cable distribution cabinet located in the space. The pipe leading to the Middle School terminates in the computer lab, so one wall there is a 4" pipe coming from the floor into an 18"x18" box. The connecting fiber

cable enters Wildwood from this pipe into the box, then exits the box, runs around the room to the adjacent book closet MDF where it is terminated in the rack.

Instructional Model

The majority of technology education happens at the elementary level for students. However, due to the inclusion of tech instruction in the specials rotation, tech instruction time is limited and integration and collaboration is limited. Technology teachers maximize the available time and bring a variety of technology instruction to students including, but not limited to keyboarding, network and internet safety, word processing, spreadsheets and presentations, programming and robotics.

Inclusion in the specials rotation results in the implementation of the “drag and drop” model of technology instruction. Teachers bring the class to the computer lab, drop them off, and then take their prep time. Technology teachers typically see classes once a week for 40 minutes. With the current model, this really means about 35 minutes due to time required to get settled and logged in. Time at the end of class is needed to logoff and gather things. Since this occurs during teacher prep time, tech teachers rarely have time to collaborate with classroom teachers to fully integrate technology. Despite this, they work with the students to identify current classroom topics and tailor the activities accordingly. The tech teachers do integrate with library, art, music and some PE.

Chromebook carts were introduced into each 4th-6th grade classroom for the fall of 2015. All 3rd-6th grade students were given network and Google apps accounts which represents a significant shift for the elementary schools. The goal is to increase the use of technology in the classroom and to integrate into classroom instruction. Technology teachers now have the option to go to the classroom for tech instruction time.

Goals for the future include classroom teachers providing grade level curriculum maps and collaboration time. Changing the mindset regarding technology and removing technology instruction from the specials rotation is necessary to more fully embrace the idea of a 21st century education. The existing model is outdated. Additional technology professional development time for classroom teachers is also needed to increase their familiarity, comfort and skill level. It would also result in better utilization of building resources.

There is an Acceptable Use Policy for students and staff in the district. Parents are asked to review the Acceptable Use Policy with their children, sign and return the district form to the main office. There is a simplified Acceptable Use Guidelines which summarizes the Acceptable use policy for students. All students receive instruction in the Acceptable Use Policy during the first two months of the school year.

Teacher Planning and Room Assignment Policies

The following information describes both the current organization of room assignments as well as the ideal configuration in a new or renovated space.

Both Fort River and Wildwood Schools were built with the “open classroom” concept in the early 1970’s. Once the district realized the limitations of that model, partial walls were erected, making the large spaces into “quads”. The majority of quads have four classroom spaces filling one large space. One upside of this approach is that it promotes collaboration and a sense of being connected to adjacent classrooms. The downsides are numerous, such as the lack of acoustic privacy which interferes with teaching and learning; the lost classroom space due to the fact that “hallways” are needed through classrooms to get to the student bathrooms; the lack of natural light in the indoor quad classrooms; etc. Crocker Farm, while having beautiful classrooms with natural light and acoustic privacy, has a traditional organization of rows of classrooms down long hallways.

The ideal classroom arrangement would be combining the best aspects of both models. Classroom neighborhoods, containing multiple spaces with acoustic privacy but in close proximity, would create the community feeling that is essential for students and teachers. It would promote the collaboration that is central to our district’s core beliefs on how to improve outcomes for students. Having small group rooms in the neighborhood also would promote our sense of inclusion and would allow for flexible grouping consistent with our co-teaching model that is being implemented. The classroom spaces in each neighborhood would offer flexibility for project-based learning that is also at the core of our instructional vision for the district. Flexible furniture would also attend to the variability of student needs in our student population.

In terms of the larger spaces, a cafeteria would support many aspects of the school community. This type of multi-use space does not exist at Fort River or Wildwood, which prevents dramatic performances or all-school assemblies from being visually accessible to all students or parents/guardians. In addition, it is currently not possible to “block off” parts of our elementary school buildings for community use. Ideally, core spaces such as the gym and cafeteria could be utilized after hours without the core learning spaces being accessible. If the reconfiguration option is chosen two connected “cafeteriums” (one for each wing) would be ideal.

The building would be designed with multiple learning spaces that are not relegated solely to the classrooms. Having clearly delineated interactive spaces in hallways where small groups of students can work with visual access from the classroom is a key component of ensuring that spaces throughout the entire school can be utilized as learning environments. Chalkboard and display walls will allow for students to feel ownership of the school while also providing additional small group teaching and working spaces.

Special Education Programs

Our student body is highly diverse in all aspects related to identity and demonstrates varied interests, strengths, and challenges. In the previous school year, 17.6% of our students were identified as having special needs. Our firm belief is that supporting this group of students in academic and social-emotional areas is our ethical responsibility and is beneficial to all students. We partner with the Special Education Parent Advisory Council to run parent events, to receive feedback on our programming, and to assist our district on interview teams and with the hiring process. In addition, two members of the executive board of our SEPAC were on the Educational Working Group with David Stephen.

We host robust in-district programs for students with more significant disabilities because we believe that retaining these students in district with their community peers is beneficial not only to the students with special needs, but to all students in the district. At the current time, only two students are being serviced in an out-of-district placement.

Academic Individualized Mainstream Support (AIMS) Program – specialized programming for students who have a high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder or other neurological conditions with pragmatic language, executive functioning, socialization and sensory regulation difficulties. This program offers individualized, comprehensive, and intensive intervention to address these areas.

Intensive Learning Needs Program – specialized program for students who present with highly complicated learning profiles and educational needs that require a significant degree of program coordination and service. These students may have one or more disabilities in any of the following areas: Autism, Communication Impairment, Developmental Delay, Health Impairment, Intellectual Impairment, Neurological Impairment, Physical Impairment, Sensory Impairment, and / or Specific Learning Disabilities. This program provides support and services to students with significant needs within the least restrictive setting while focusing on the individual needs of the students.

Building Blocks Therapeutic Program – specialized programming for students whose primary needs are social, emotional, and/or behavioral. This program is designed for students whose needs require a smaller, structured therapeutic setting for all or part of the day. A high staff to student ratio is maintained with individualized programming to meet the needs. Services and support are provided on an individual basis and are designed to assist students in developing effective coping mechanisms and problem-solving strategies towards becoming more fully integrated with their typical peers when appropriate.

In addition to our specialized programs, we offer a wide range of services for our students with special needs who are not in district programs. A number of instructional strategies are being implemented to implemented this year is co-teaching.

Co-teaching is a service delivery system in which two or more teachers share instructional responsibility for a single group of students, primarily in a single classroom or workspace, for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, shared resources and joint accountability (although each individual's level of participation may vary). Research conducted over the last 30 years shows that students with disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms are more likely than their peers who are educated in separate classrooms to:

- Acquire reading and math skills,
- Graduate from high school,
- Go on to post-secondary education,
- Have better communication skills,
- Obtain meaningful social relationships, and
- Be welcomed and contributing members of their communities.

Instructional benefits of co-teaching include:

- Strategies integrated into classroom routines
- Skills generalized to authentic tasks
- Immediate application of strategies
- Opportunity for daily practice
- Strategies used across the curriculum
- Problem-solving built into lessons
- Improved instruction for all students
- Instructional fragmentation is minimized
- Co-teacher/special service educator understands the expectation for academics and behavior
- Co-teaching provides support and staff development

Historically, there has been a small amount of co-teaching taking place within our schools. When this has occurred, co-teaching has most often best described the staffing pattern rather than the instructional model. Professional development for faculty and staff is essential so that co-teaching pairs learn the differing models of instruction and the necessary skills. This year, we have implemented co-teaching in all of our schools, at all levels. While the research clearly demonstrates the efficacy of this instructional strategy, it is important that we continue to gather feedback from the students learning in this environment to assess their experience. One challenge to our implementation of co-teaching is the physical spaces available at Fort River and Wildwood. The open classrooms lack acoustic privacy, which is critical to many students. In addition, the infrastructure does not easily allow for multiple work spaces in a room, which makes flexible grouping a significant hurdle. In a renovated or new building, we plan to prioritize creating flexible spaces that are consistent with our educational philosophy of inclusion and appropriate responses to student variability.

The core related service providers—Speech/Language, Occupational and Physical Therapists, along with Behavior Specialist/BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)— provide required and essential services to students identified with 504 Plans and Individual Educational Plans that include both consultation and direct service in general education and pull-out educational settings. In addition, these professionals, as well as the Vision Specialist, the Teachers of the Hard of Hearing, Autism Specialists and the Assistive Technology Specialist provide screening, evaluation, consultation and collaboration with various teams of professionals serving students. In many cases, the professional therapist works alongside a para-educator with an individual or small group of students while some students may work with the therapist alone. On a regular, but less frequent basis, the professional therapists provide co-treatment to address a combination of skills in a small group experiential or functional learning scenario, such as the Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist with game skills or the Speech Language Pathology and Occupational Therapist with a unit study-based activity. The therapists consult directly with classroom or special education teachers to make connections to general education curriculum when possible. In addition to service, teams of related service providers, such as the Occupational Therapists or OT/ST, provide training to the school faculty in utilizing specialized techniques, like S'cool Moves or Zones of Regulation, which benefit the student body as a whole. Related service providers are integrated into professional practice teams at Wildwood and the other elementary schools. Several providers also supervise and support the professional

development of graduate students during internship placement at Wildwood. Specific Speech Language, Occupation, and Physical Therapy staff are dedicated to the district-wide Intensive Learning Needs program. The core related service providers are an integral part of the Wildwood Resource Team. This larger group of providers, teachers of special education, guidance counselors and school psychologists review and develop practices and programs for the benefit of the students they serve through regular meetings and sub-committee assignments.

ELL Program

The Amherst Public Schools' population of English language learners in the elementary age range includes approximately 193 students who speak languages including but not limited to: Cambodian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. Over 40 languages are spoken by our students. Each school has well-trained professional staff who are well-versed in techniques of teaching English as a Second Language and Sheltered English Instruction as well as being familiar with students' cultural, linguistic, and academic experiences. ELLs are supported by 9.5 ELL teachers and 2 aides. Additionally, interpreters are employed to provide clarification in the native language for the English Language Learners who cannot perform coursework in English.

ELL teachers provide instruction both in the mainstream grade-level classroom (push-in/inclusion) and in the ELL classroom (pull-out). The type of instruction is determined by a student's English proficiency.

ELL small group spaces should be located adjacent to or within grade level classroom neighborhoods to promote flexible grouping and reduced instructional time lost to travel. They also need acoustic privacy as students learning a new language have more challenges with understanding content with auditory distractions. As technology to support ELL students is rapidly developing, ensuring that ELL spaces are fully wired is an instructional necessity.

Our elementary district has recently seen a significant increase in "Level 1" ELL students, who have little to no English language skills. Two years ago, the district had 5 Level 1 ELL students; there are currently 33 Level 1 ELL students. This increase is primarily due to the expansion of international programs at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. While we would like to create an "ELL Newcomer" program, these students are currently spread across our three schools, so no grade level at any school has enough students in this category to merit creating this program. Although we try to teach these students as best we can while also maintaining our commitment to all ELL students — including those who have been progressing in their language development for several years — these two distinct ELL populations require distinct instructional models, which are difficult to balance for our dedicated ELL teachers. The reconfiguration model will allow for the creation of this Newcomer Center since students can be easily grouped by grade level across the district in the same building.

Transportation Policies

The Town of Amherst, in conjunction with the Amherst Public Schools, provides transportation. In addition to the state requirements for the transportation of students, as outlined in Chapter 71,

Section 68 of the laws of the Commonwealth, Amherst students who reside one and one half miles or more from the school they are entitled to attend shall be provided daily transportation to and from school. Exceptions to this mileage limit may be made by the Superintendent whenever the route to school is determined to be a dangerous way. The School District provides transportation to the special education and special education pre-school students.

The busses service the local elementary school, and due to time and scheduling constraints, the middle and high school students are dropped off between 7:25 am and 7:35 am so that the elementary runs can occur directly after that dropoff. The faculty/staff provide supervision to students during arrival and dismissal times. Past practice has been to limit rider time to less than 35 minutes per route. The limited size of the school site and the limited street access points cause traffic and safety issues for both busses and pedestrian students. Parents picking up students park along the West side of the building which is clearly marked. A crossing guard is provided at the juncture Strong Street and East Pleasant Street for walkers.

Dismissal time is 3:05 pm. Busses typically do not arrive until 2:50 pm.

Loading of students occurs with a release of older students first and younger students last.

All students are introduced to bus conduct and proper behavior on, in and around the bus at bus stops, arrivals and departures.

Bus evacuations are conducted by all schools in accordance with the law.

Lunch Programs

The primary goal of the Amherst Food Service Program is to serve delicious and healthy meals to as many children as possible. This goal has become increasingly important as the percentage of income-eligible families in Amherst has risen substantially over the past several years. The Amherst Public Schools contract with Whitsons, a food service management company, to administer its food service program.

The Amherst Food Service program participates in the National School Lunch and Breakfast program. Lunch runs from 11:25 A.M. - 12:45 P.M. and serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Wildwood serves approximately 170 lunches and 58 breakfasts each day. The kitchen is staffed by one manager and two support personnel.

There are two serving lines that lead to a single register. The serving line space is not very flexible and has limited the opportunities to provide promotional activities like guest chefs and the inclusion of a salad bar. The natural light in the cafeteria is limited as well, primarily because of two partitions that divide the cafeteria into three grade specific eating areas.

Functional & Spatial Relationships and Key Programmatic Adjacencies

How the learning areas work together with our educational priorities

The current Wildwood School was opened in 1970 as a model for the open-classroom educational approach. While at one time there were 600 students served, currently 420 come to school each day. Amherst and the surrounding towns are experiencing a downward trend in enrollment. In addition, Wildwood houses a specialized district-wide special education program and an increased ELL population. Within the past five years, Wildwood absorbed students from a closed elementary school as well as additional/different students from re-districting of the student population.

The guiding principles of excitement and engagement, building community, adaptability and flexibility, collaboration and sharing expertise with a foundation of sustainability make this school “A Place Where You Want to Be.” Creating a sustainable building coincides with the community’s sense of social equity and climate justice.

- I. Relationships between classrooms and programs
 - a. The school needs student-centered learning spaces that allow for flexibility in use to address the needs of diverse learners and adapt to changes in instructional programs
 - b. Connections between clustered classrooms should be fostered in order to support cohorts of teacher and students in building a sense of community and ownership
 - c. The school accommodates a variety of inclusion, pull-out and reverse inclusion services for students of varying learning needs. The school would need classroom, grade level or grade cluster neighborhoods that allow for sharing of break-out spaces and “maker spaces”
 - d. The school needs spaces that promote student access to the curriculum following Universal Design for Learning. This includes break-out spaces, maker spaces, and science lab for upper-grade classrooms
- II. Spaces inside and outside of classrooms
 - a. The playgrounds are well-used both during school and as a community resource.
 - b. The surrounding trails and curated spaces provide a starting point for indoor/outdoor connections.
- III. Specialized instruction/Inclusion
 - a. The school houses a successful Intensive Learning Program that provides effective and safe learning environments for students with wide-ranging interests and abilities, the physical design of which is integral to the success of the program
 - b. The school would need areas that support regulation through the use of fitness or chill-zones.
- IV. After school/Community Use
 - a. The Monday thru Friday after-school programs are in need of space to engage in sports, play, eating, homework, reading instruction, and tutorials
 - b. It is important for the community-at-large to have access for family resources, parent-guardian organizations and other groups such as resource center/meeting room
- V. Shared spaces
 - a. A priority design element is to provide gathering spaces for classrooms, grade levels and the whole school

- b. The community has identified the Arts and Technology, along with PE, Music and Library as integral to elementary education. These each require shared classrooms, storage, and workspaces
- c. A critical element of the new or renovated school is the “small school experience and building community” which are supported through a safe and inviting entry space in which families of diverse backgrounds and community members with diverse interests feel welcomed

The small learning communities would be based on grade level clustering. Each “pod” of 3-4 classrooms per wing per grade level would function in that way. For staff collaboration, the advantage of the preferred option is that these learning communities can be combined for the full complement of teachers at a grade level easily since all staff at that grade level will be in the same building. This is important for curricular decisions and for alignment. However, the smaller grouping of 3-4 teachers is a more functional group size for intensive day-to-day collaboration for teachers. From a student perspective, their learning community will have different levels. One will be their grade level, which will be roughly 75 students. Another level will be their co-located school of 375 students. It would be rare that the entire student body of 750 would gather together, which is consistent with what we heard from co-located schools in Acton, Bridgeport, and Milton.

Security & Visual Access Requirements

The Wildwood School, as all schools in the Amherst MA, requires a safe environment for the Staff, Students and Public.

- A facility that is locked at all times. An access control system for staff members that allow their staff identification badge to grant access to the building
- A receptionist monitoring main access point(s)
- Visual Security of the main entrance utilizing a video monitoring system that will be monitored at the school secretary’s desk.
- Visitors to the building should be granted access via door release after communicating with the secretary via video and audio intercom
- Video surveillance and recording of all areas on the interior and exterior of the building
- Safe, well-lit parking for staff
- Safe, well-lit parking for visitors in close proximity to the building
- Safe vehicular student drop-off and pick-up areas (without crossing traffic)
- Safe pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists coming from varied directions to the school
- Safe bus access systems that do not interfere with drop-off and pick-up traffic
- Safe recess grounds and play fields that can be properly supervised by staff and protected from vehicle traffic
- Safe access for kitchen, facility and shipping / receiving separate from school traffic to the main entrance
- Safe and appropriate access to the perimeter of the building and play fields
- High ratio of staff to students while on outside activities
- All staff trained in a district safety procedures and protocols

Acknowledgments

Educational Visioning

A working group of educational and community leaders and parents/guardians was formed to develop many aspects of this Educational Plan, including the Guiding Principles and 21st Century Learning Goals, among others. The membership included:

Katherine Appy, Amherst School Committee Chair
Wendy Bergoffen, Parent/Guardian
Ron Bohonowicz, Director of Facilities and Maintenance for the Schools and the Town
Alyssa Brewer, Amherst Select Board Chair
Jackie Churchill, Community Member
Chris Eggemeier, Classroom Teacher
Bobbie Finocchio, Principal
Terri Geffert, ELL Teacher
Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Monica Hall, Director of Equity and Professional Development
Rick Hood, Amherst School Committee Member
Mary Lambert, Math Coach
Laura Kent, Parent/Guardian
Rebecca Klaus, ELL Teacher
Stephen Lott, Classroom Teacher
Michael Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Irv Rhodes, Community Member
Derek Shea, Principal
Nicole Singer, Art Teacher
Nicole Sproehnle, Parent/Guardian
Nancy Stewart, Parent/Guardian
Marylou Theilman, Amherst Finance Committee
Betsy Todd, Special Education Teacher
Gioia Woods, Classroom Teacher
Nick Yaffe, Principal
David Ziomek, Interim Town Manager

In addition, many other Amherst Public School staff members and administrators contributed to this document in their area of expertise in the curricular sections.

Draft Redistricting Maps

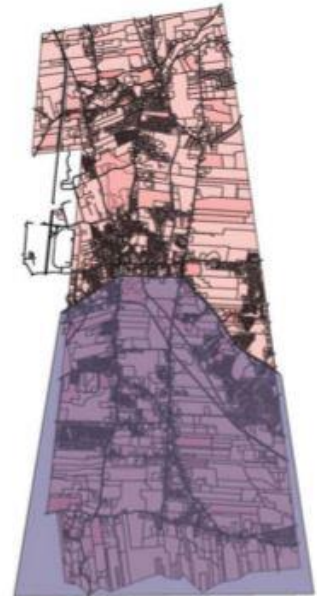
Category	Range Between Schools
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	2%

2-6 (750 Students) School Option 1

Category	Range Between Schools
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	0.6%

2-6 (750 Students) School Option 2

Route 9



NE/SW



East/West

Category	Range Between Schools
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	6%



2-6 (750 Students) School Option 3

