

SLIDE 1:

My name is Anastasia Ordonez, and I'm the Chair of the Amherst School Committee. I'd like to thank the Town Council and Town Manager for the invitation to present the state of Amherst's schools, and to all those in attendance. I want to also acknowledge our superintendent Dr. Michael Morris, and our other SC members Eric Nakajima, Allison McDonald, Peter Demling, and Kerry Spitzer. It is an honor and privilege to serve you all.

SLIDE 2:

In 2019, Amherst public schools host a diverse and engaged student body that lead in our communities through political and civic advocacy, gardening programs, community enrichment, performing arts, academic focus, cultural events, and in many other ways. We're proud of our Amherst elementary school students, educators, staff, and volunteers.

SLIDE 3:

A few facts about our elementary schools. Amherst has three public schools that are roughly the same in student population and demographics. Our three schools are Wildwood, Fort River, and Crocker Farm, and there are approximately 1,146 students in preschool through grade 6. There are also about 90 students who currently choice in from other surrounding school districts. Our elementary school budget for fiscal year 2020 is \$23,838,854.

SLIDE 4:

We enjoy a strong statewide reputation for our public schools, a legacy that our community values and prioritizes. A few highlights of the current state of our academics include: the district consistently meets state progress and accountability goals, though persistent gaps remain among high needs students and other groups; we rank significantly above state average in student attendance; our schools exceed district goals to lower student discipline rates, with an emphasis on social-emotional wellbeing; we have consistently low participation rates in MCAS testing (this test is not required below grade 10); and we've seen a decline in recent years of our students choosing to attend local charter schools (84 total, down 3.4%)

SLIDE 5:

Our community is changing making us more ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse. This is a wonderful thing that is celebrated in our schools. To give you a sense of these changes, I've highlighted demographic shifts in the following slides.

SLIDE 6:

A high needs student is defined in the state of Massachusetts as "either low income (prior to School Year 2015), economically disadvantaged (starting in School Year 2015), or ELL, or former ELL, or a student with disabilities."

SLIDE 7:

According to the state of Massachusetts, an economically disadvantaged student is "calculated based on a student's participation in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Transitional Assistance

for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC); the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) foster care program; and MassHealth (Medicaid).”

SLIDE 8:

The number of English Language Learners has stayed relatively flat in the past few years.

SLIDE 9:

Our students identified with disabilities have trended upwards over the past few years, and are currently at 21 percent.

SLIDES 10-14:

The next few slides identify the racial and ethnic makeup of our schools' students.

SLIDE 15:

There are many accomplishments in the district that help maintain an excellent reputation for our elementary schools across the state. Here are a few highlights of this past year's accomplishments that we wanted to bring to the Council's attention.

→ **Dual Language Program:** 37 kindergarten students, nearly 50 percent have Spanish language background

→ **Strategic Improvement Plan:** Each school developing building-wide program to focus on social-emotional wellbeing, improved communication and engagement with parents/caregivers, and project-based instruction

→ **MSBA Application:** Folks might have heard the good news that just yesterday the MSBA voted unanimously to accept Amherst into its Core Program pipeline. We're grateful for this opportunity, and grateful for all the educators, parents, and concerned community members who attended the 9 listening sessions held earlier this year to build a consensus plan for a proposed K-5 or K-6 building to replace Fort River and Wildwood

→ **6th Grade Advisory Group:** Exploring various aspects of whether 6th grade should move to ARMS (recommendation expected 2020)

SLIDE 16:

There are also significant challenges that will require the complete attention of the School Committee, Superintendent, and community to address.

→ Significant facilities investments will be needed in next few years, regardless of MSBA timeline, due to failing operational systems

→ Added support to close academic gaps so all students can meet expectations and succeed

→ We continue to want and need more engagement from parents, caregivers, and community, and our schools and district are focused on making this happen

There is a lot more that I could talk about with respect to our schools, but this program does have a time limit so I'll leave it at that. This concludes the state of our schools report to the Town; a formal written report will be submitted soon to accompany this presentation.

If you have any questions, please email Dr. Morris at morrism@arps.org or the Amherst School Committee at schoolcommittee@arps.org. Thank you.