

# Superintendent's 30-Day Update

Wednesday, February 12, 2020

Hi Folks,

Today is the 100th day of the 2019-20 school year. We are just days away from our February break, and it has been a very busy start to 2020 for both students and staff.

## **School Break Schedule & Calendar Reminders:**

- **February 17 - February 21, 2020: February Vacation - No School**
- February 26, 2020: School Committee Meeting - 7pm, Avery; Technology Update
- **March 3, 2020: No School - Professional Development**
- March 4, 2020: School Committee Meeting - 7pm, Avery; Facilities Usage Update
- March 18, 2020: School Committee Meeting - 7pm, Town Hall; Special Ed Update

\*A reminder, you can link a copy of the School Calendar to your online/phone calendars via [DPS website](#).

## **State of the Schools 2020:**

On Wednesday evening, January 29, 2020, I presented my annual [State of the Schools Address](#) to the Dedham School Committee. The presentation showcased the success of the district's focus on building a strong, progressive early childhood education program, the growth trends showing anticipated record class sizes, the district's investments in expanding fine arts in the schools, the success of a continuum of special education programs in reducing out-of-district placements, and the strategic, forward-looking efforts for facilities and campus circulation planning. Key takeaways from this address include:

- Our investment in free, full-day Kindergarten and evidence based curriculum for our youngest students is where we believe the greatest future gains in student learning will be achieved. Our new ECEC has become the gateway to the Dedham Public School district and is the envy of districts across the state for its integrated, progressive learning approach.
- Current class size growth trends - highlighted by a current Kindergarten class that is the largest in the last 18 years - require the district to look for ways to ensure that plans and decisions, including facilities, budgeting and programming, are taking a long-range view for continued consistency and positive momentum.
- This year marked the first year that Elementary students in 4th and 5th grade were offered the chance for in-school, instrumental music classes across the district. The new program is part of the District's focus on expanding and rededicating efforts towards Fine and Performing Arts in the schools. Over 160 Elementary students are taking instrumental music classes this year during the school day, an increase of more than 100 students over last year!
- The increasingly lower out-of-district rates, now at 44 students down from 74 a decade ago, highlight the growing success of the District's efforts to enhance and build a strong special education program based on a continuum of programs offering consistent support from K through to students up to age 22. The new LifeStart program aimed at 18-22 year old Dedham Public Schools students is an outstanding example of how to build a program that responds to student needs and keeps them in the community.

The [State of the Schools presentation](#) also included highlights on current initiatives underway regarding student social and emotional health, and outlined current plans for next steps including the development of a new, 5-year District plan over the next few months. Parents and community members interested in viewing the State of the Schools presentation can find a link to the slides on the Dedham Public Schools website at [www.dedham.k12.ma.us](http://www.dedham.k12.ma.us).

## **Planning For Our Future:**

### **DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS MASTER FACILITIES PLANNING -**

On Monday, January 13, 2020 we held the fourth community forum to finalize community input in the [Dedham Public Schools facilities master planning project](#). The master planning project aims to explore the needs of the Riverdale, Oakdale and Greenlodge Elementary School buildings, all facilities that have not undergone significant renovations in the last 30 years.

- The next major step in the School Facility Master Planning process includes the submission of a Statement of Interest (SOI) letter to the Massachusetts State Building Authority by April 2020. This submission would begin the process of securing State support to partially fund the construction, renovation, addition or repair of at least one Dedham Elementary School. The SOI is scheduled to be officially voted on by the Dedham School Committee at the March 4, 2020 meeting.
- Parents and community members with questions or input, who are unable to attend are invited to learn more about the Dedham School Facility Master Plan process, at [www.dedham.k12.ma.us](http://www.dedham.k12.ma.us), where they can submit online questions or comments.

### **SCHOOL CAMPUS TRAFFIC CIRCULATION STUDY**

In response to the critical need for improving student and staff safety in Avery Elementary, Dedham Middle School, Dedham High School campus and surrounding areas, the Dedham schools have been working with traffic engineering firm, VHB, to explore alternative ways to improve student safety and alleviate concerns with school and athletic event traffic.

On Tuesday, [February 4th, VHB](#) showcased some of their preliminary findings in the form of 8 different possible options for improving the flow and circulation of traffic and pedestrians around the school campuses. Each option currently proposed builds off the findings from three data collection periods over the last ten months. Community and Parent input into this process is critical.

We urge you to make your voices heard! You can view the proposed traffic pattern options currently under review - and provide online input - at [www.dedham.k12.ma.us/traffic](http://www.dedham.k12.ma.us/traffic)

## **2020-2021 School Budget Proposal:**

On Wednesday, January 15, 2020 I presented my [FY21 Superintendent's Proposed Budget](#) at the School Committee's regularly scheduled meeting. This proposal represented the needs of all 7 schools in the district and was the result of meetings with all budget stakeholders within the District to identify key needs, then a process to prioritize those needs in efforts to come close to a reasonable budget proposal, based on the Town's available resources. This initial public hearing and proposal represented a 5.87% overall annual increase in the school department's budget over the FY20 (2019-20) budget.

Over the next two weeks the School Committee provided additional opportunities for public input and debated the various identified priorities. On January 29, the School Committee Budget Subcommittee

trimmed the proposal to a 5.50% increase and this final budget was recommended and ultimately approved by vote of the entire School Committee.

Some budget highlights of importance:

- In the FY 2021 budget, a 4.22% increase alone is required to meet the agreed upon "level service" increases - the salary costs for maintaining our current staffing next year.
- Also of note, while we have successfully reduced our Out-of-District numbers, the cost for the remaining OOD placements continues to rise dramatically
- Lastly, a key factor in the current budget proposal is meeting the growing needs of our student population. Next year's Kindergarten class is anticipated to be the biggest class in the last 25 years, and our current Kindergarten class is the largest in 18 years.

On **Thursday, March 5** Dedham Town Manager Leon Goodwin will be presenting his budget message to the Board of Selectmen. The School Department's final approved FY21 School Committee Budget will be presented to the Finance Committee on **Tuesday, March 17**. This is a wonderful opportunity for parents to come support our schools. Ultimately, the final appropriation for the schools will be decided at Dedham's annual Spring Town Meeting at Dedham High School on Monday, May 18, 2020. Thank you for our continued interest and support of the public schools throughout this FY21 budget development process.

## **Highlights From Around The District:**

*Click on each link to read more! You can also follow these stories throughout the month on our District Homepage at [www.dedham.k12.ma.us](http://www.dedham.k12.ma.us)*

### **Celebrating World Read Aloud Day on February 5th**

Students across the Dedham school district celebrated the wonderful world of books on World Read Aloud Day. From local celebrity readers, school leaders and students, to online Skype readings, students were able to listen and enjoy the power of a great story read aloud to them.

### **All Hearts - DHS & DMS Focus on Healthy Hearts for Valentines**

Heart health has become a focus for the week leading up to Valentine's Day for Dedham Middle and High School students. Learn how these students are keeping their hearts healthy.

### **Dedham Students Shine at All Town Instrumental Concert**

On Wednesday, February 5th , over 300 students from Dedham Public Schools took to the stage for an all-town instrumental concert. Dedham students from 4th through 12th grade performed together showcasing the incredible musical talent across all age groups. The concert is the first performance for over 160 Elementary students who began taking instrumental music classes this year during the school day.

### **Dedham Schools Hosts TEC Legislative Breakfast**

Dedham Public Schools hosted local administrators and state legislators at a Legislative Breakfast sponsored by The Education Cooperative on Friday, February 7th.

### **Congratulate Avery Music Teacher Mrs. Sara Santos**

Avery's music teacher Sara Santos has been chosen to be honored as an "Astonishing Woman" by the Wheelock Family Theatre, after being nominated by the family of a student.

## **Dedham Recognized for Digital Learning**

Dedham was recognized by a national non-profit organization - EducationSuperHighway - for our use of technology as a means of helping non-verbal preschool students in the classroom.

## **DMS Geography Bee Champions!**

At the annual Dedham Middle School Geography Bee in January, Dedham 6th grader, Harrison Abber, beat out his fellow middle schoolers to emerge victorious as the school Geography Champion. Fellow 7th graders, Adham Estowro and Gregory Kaladjian took 2nd place and 3rd place wins, respectively.

My next Superintendent's 30-Day Update will be sent on the 120th school day of the year on Friday, March 20, 2020. Until then, as always, please feel free to send me your thoughts via email at: [mwelch@dedham.k12.ma.us](mailto:mwelch@dedham.k12.ma.us), or follow me on Twitter at [@MJWelchDedham](https://twitter.com/MJWelchDedham). I would love to hear your feedback. Thank you for your ongoing support of the Dedham Public Schools!

All my best,

Michael J. Welch  
Superintendent  
Dedham Public Schools