

ANDOVER WARRIORS FOR EDUCATION

On Thursday evening, February 13 - over 60 parents, teachers, and students from across Andover gathered in collaboration to pool their collective effort and generate new ideas about how to build community-based schools that reflect our community values. Working groups brainstormed three topics: (1) Quality Curriculum; (2) Student Well-Being; and, (3) Budget Priorities. The product of this effort was the formation of a new community coalition: aptly named, the Andover Warriors for Education (AWE). AWE is committed to bringing the unified voice of parents, teachers, and students to the forefront of decision-making in our schools.

At its first meeting, AWE identified areas of critical need within each topic area of Quality Curriculum, Student Well-Being, and Budget Priorities. AWE believes that the School Committee and School Administration should engage coalition groups like AWE as a way to connect with students, educators, and community members to address these areas of critical need as collaboratively as possible.

1. Quality Curriculum

- We must adequately staff classrooms → more teachers in our schools and in our classroom means smaller class sizes, and that allows teachers the ability to implement small group learning to the benefit of all children → in smaller classes, children get more attention from teachers and that means better learning for our children.
- Our teachers are our experts when it comes to vetting new curriculum -- when exploring new curriculum, we must seek teacher involvement and input in a meaningful way. We must implement researched curriculum that emphasizes relationships with the real world and real people. The goal of any new curriculum that we adopt should be to encourage self-directed exploration and inquiry about the real world.
- We must explore new curriculum that prepares students for a new economy and jobs in tech, STEM, data analysis, and human skills that pair well with jobs in those fields. Curriculum that achieves this directive need not be solely technology based to be cutting edge.
- We must pursue curriculum programs that are writing based and that hone the writing skills of our students. The written word remains the most enduring and effective form of communication.
- We must require that the administration gather input from students and teachers and parents when exploring new curriculum.

2. Student Well-Being

- *We must increase counselors and case managers to address the mental health needs and well-being of our students.
- We must set policies that emphasize interpersonal relationships and quality connection between students to students / teachers to students / teachers to teachers / teachers to students / teachers to administrators → and we must always keep in mind in setting these policies that teacher conditions are student conditions.
- We must reduce the caseloads of our SPED teachers and increase employees on the job for guidance, SPED, IEPs, and social work.
- We must institute more project-based learning, less testing, and shift focus away from enforcement of the letter grade.

3. **Budget Priorities**

- We must continue, even increase, our efforts to improve our facilities and address deteriorating buildings.
- We must prioritize the most essential aspects of student learning and development to build a foundation that equips students to thrive K-12.
- We must increase the number of intervention specialists at the elementary and middle school level: more support staff and support teachers like EL teachers. We must provide 1:1 support when necessary, but understand that the average student facing a rigorous curriculum will likely respond successfully to a small group learning environment rather than the more costly SPED intervention.
- We must address the lack of curriculum and policies to assist gifted students to advance their unique trajectory and increase in SPED assistance in this area.
- We must institute TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY in the budget process. We all agree setting our school budget is an intensely complicated process and the community is asking for and needs more information to understand and adequately process how the school budget works.
- When exploring costly initiatives, we must conduct due diligence in collecting research and evidence to support the efficacy of any new programming, understand how to measure the successes and failures of new initiatives, and ensure the public is adequately informed and has ample time to provide input.