



Ann Arbor Public Schools

Superintendent Update

Board of Education

Wednesday, September 27, 2023

As we approach October of this 2023-2024 school year, we are grateful to see students, teachers, staff and families fully engaged in all the school activities of the fall season.

All schools have successfully completed curriculum nights with overall high numbers of parent and family participation. We are in the midst of homecoming weeks at our high schools, and many schools are also planning to engage their communities in the [National Walk & Roll to School Day](#) coming up on October 4th. School communities are welcome to celebrate any day in October, and whether addressing the need to make routes to school safer for active trips to school or encouraging children to be more active, these events can be powerful tools to leverage and inspire lasting change.

A reminder that the AAPS fall break for students and staff is coming up on October 13th & 16th.

We look forward to parent-teacher conferences that will occur in schools during October and November; parents can check in at their schools for specific schedules.

I want to share a special thank you with our students and teachers, support staff and principals, our parents and families. Together, we are consistently taking steps every day, continuing our work to strengthen our practice of dignity, belonging, and well-being for every child, every day across all our AAPS schools.

Special Education Update

I am thankful, alongside Assistant Superintendents Ms. Linden and Ms. Parks and members of our team, to have convened yesterday afternoon the initial organizational meeting of the AAPS cross-sector Special Education Improvement team. We continue to refine to ensure that all staff groups are represented and look forward to continuing this important team connection each month to ensure consistent coordination and communication in our work. We will be meeting throughout this school year with these representatives from staff across the AAPS system on our progress to support our capable team with ongoing improvement efforts in special education.

OSE is pleased to share the Staff/Leader [OSE Monthly Newsletter](#). In our second year of this communication tool, we have a special focus on Mr. Cornelius Minor's work as well as seeking ongoing feedback regarding staff and leaders' needs.

We value and recognize the important role of paraeducators, and welcome our first cohort of five Eastern Michigan University *Grow Your Own* paraeducators who are currently participating in student teaching in AAPS classrooms. Following this fall semester, these paraeducators will achieve their teacher certification as highly qualified teachers of EI, working with students with Emotional Impairment, and they will be well prepared to step into teaching positions moving forward.

We have been diligently working and planning this 'Para to Teacher' educator pipeline endeavor for several years, and the completion of the program by this first cohort group represents a notable milestone in the AAPS. An exciting reminder that this initial cohort group is the first of five cohorts now working their way through a paraeducator-to-teacher certification program. This fall is a great time for each of us to reach out to encourage these hardworking para-to-teacher candidates who are answering the call to serve students in critical need positions.

This year also marks the launch of our first paraeducator Teacher Learning Network. This is a peer-led group that has emerged from our Paraeducator Professional Development Committee and will develop their work around themes to address the needs of the membership as a whole with the goal of promoting support, collegiality, and professional growth for this valued team.

District Health/Well-being

The first Early Release Day of the 2023-24 school year occurred today and featured a professional development session on Employee Well-Being using the [Office of Surgeon General's 5 Essentials for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being](#).

The focus for the session today was the essential: "Connection and Community." The agenda included two short videos with content provided by Bill Harris and Jenna Bacolor interspersed with resources, staff discussions and activities.

We are excited to feature three additional early release day sessions focused on employee well-being this school year. This effort is foundational to district efforts to develop a Multi-Tier System of Support for students. The Leadership Council meeting just prior to each Early Release Day is focused on leader well-being and preparation for the staff well-being session.

Over recent days, 1200+ AAPS staff have completed the Fall Staff Well-Being Survey. High-level results will be shared at the next early release day and with principals/school teams. The results will help focus actions for improvement and serve as a benchmark for our work to improve employee well-being.

Community Division: Community Education and Recreation (Rec & Ed) Before/After Care

Rec & Ed's Early Childhood Division -- the [Trike-a-Thon Fall Festival](#) is this weekend! Trike-a-Thon is a First Steps PTO-sponsored family event to raise scholarship funds for First Steps.

[Youth Soccer Practice and Play](#) and [Flag Football](#) registrations begin on October 2nd.

We continue our diligent work to interview and hire staff for the Before/After Care program; we appreciate everyone sharing this information and sending quality candidates our way to fill these important openings on our AAPS team.

Capital Program Update

Architects working with the Capital Program team are seeking feedback from Dicken, Logan and Thurston students, parents and staff, in group-specific meetings, over these days at the end of September and in early October.

We are excited that these engagement sessions are opportunities to receive stakeholder feedback to inform the next phase of schematic designs. Previous engagements for all three projects have included meetings with school leadership, school design advisory groups, school staff, teaching and learning, safety and security, transportation, food service, the Community Division, ITD, and Operations teams, among others.

AAPS Exceptional Teacher - Kent Wattleworth

You may have noticed the [recent AAPS News profile highlighting the career of Kent Wattleworth](#), who has been teaching choir and music history in the Humanities class at Huron High School since 2017. He is the musical director for the school musicals and has led the Huron choirs on two international tours to Ireland and Scotland. Before teaching in Ann Arbor, he taught in the Chippewa Valley, Dearborn, and Hudsonville school districts.

During Mr. Wattleworth's career, he has prepared choirs to sing with the Macomb Symphony Orchestra, the Warren Symphony Orchestra, the Detroit Opera Theatre, and the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra. He has taught vocal music at every level from K-12 since 1998 as well as secondary choral methods at Oakland University.

We value and appreciate the contributions of Mr. Wattleworth and all members of our Team AAPS, who work and invest their talents and lives each day in service to our AAPS students. Thanks to Jo Mathis, who writes the Exceptional Teacher profile pieces.

National Hispanic American Heritage Month - September 15 - October 15

Each year, our nation observes National Hispanic American Heritage Month by honoring the histories, cultures and contributions of Americans whose ancestors arrived here from Mexico, Spain, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

In the Ann Arbor Public Schools, we honor and celebrate the valued contributions of Hispanic Americans on every day of the school year, and we also participate in the national observance that falls each year from mid-September to mid-October.

This month of special celebration provides an opportunity to listen and learn even more deeply about the rich diversity within Hispanic communities and the strong connections to all facets of American culture, literature and history.

We are a stronger Ann Arbor Public Schools community as we honor, embrace and celebrate our diversity, continually create a culture of belonging for all, and value the connections that unite us as an inclusive Ann Arbor community.

You may read the full [AAPS National Hispanic American Heritage Month Announcement here](#).

Ann Arbor Open School at Mack Celebrates 100 Years

We look forward to a Mack School 100-Year Anniversary Celebration, to be held in the Mack auditorium on Saturday, October 7th.

The program will start at 2:00 PM and include talks about the history of the school, teachers and principals, as well as music by Joan Belgrave and Charles Larkins, Jr., and of course, singing the Mack School song. The group of alumni putting on this celebration will welcome any present students, parents and teachers to join them.

National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalists

The Ann Arbor Public Schools congratulates 45 students who have recently been named Semi-Finalists in the [2024 National Merit Scholarship Program](#).

This year, the Ann Arbor Public Schools accounts for over 9% of the nearly 500 students in Michigan selected for this honor.

Ann Arbor Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift reports, “We are extremely proud of our students who have achieved National Merit Semi-Finalist status. We recognize the effort it takes to master the range of subject areas tested, and we applaud these Semi-Finalists for their excellent achievement. We also want to recognize and thank our AAPS teachers at all grade levels, who are instrumental in preparing our students for this competition, as well as our parents for their support of their young people throughout their education. We are fortunate to live in a community that values and celebrates quality educational experiences and high academic performance. Congratulations to all our scholars on this remarkable achievement.”

Over recent years, the Ann Arbor Public Schools has consistently placed among the top districts for having the most students recognized as National Merit Semi-Finalists among Michigan districts.

National Merit Scholarship winners of 2024 will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July.

The 2024 Semi-Finalists from the Ann Arbor Public Schools are:

From **Community High School**: Ingmar Newman-Taylor, Serena O’Brien, Evangeline Sarnecki and Seven R. Steiner

From **Huron High School**: Max Z. Bian, Akshar S. Cowlagi, Aidan A. Gadepalli, Anita A. Gaenko, Tai Karir, Doyeon Kim, Teyin A. Kim, Vanya Krishna, Ethan H. Ku, Nathan S. Leung, Zachary E.

Lin, Melinda Mei, Samuel P. Regenbogen, Madhav Sivadasan, Bradley E. Spector and Anirudh S. Venkat

From **Pioneer High School**: Benjamin W. Botkin, Katerina S. Freudenberg, Oskar H. Hanson, Mason B. Holst, Micah A. Jacobson, Jessica Jia, Iris M. Maturen, Mateo C. Palomares, Sarina E. Pottow, Cameron M. Russell, Janelle M. Schafer, Alexander Swanson, Sophia S. Wang and Alain H. Zhou

From **Skyline High School**: Ajan V. Arora, Nicholas C. Barnocki, David P. Chen, Simran Kheterpal, Joshua J. Lee, Ezra J. Min, Devayani S. Pradhan, Caitlyn M. Trievel, Sari K. Woo, Grace L. Yao and Emma B. Zamansky

Communication from the AAPS

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- On Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/AnnArborPublicSchools>
- Subscribe to our A2Schools podcast at: <https://a2schools.buzzsprout.com>
- AAPS YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/AnnArborPublicSchools>.

We are grateful for the partnership and support of all in our AAPS community in our work together to support our students, staff, schools and this beautiful Ann Arbor Public Schools community we all share.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve in the Ann Arbor Public Schools, and for the opportunity to share this Superintendent Update this evening.

Sincerely,



Jeanice Kerr Swift
Superintendent of Schools
Ann Arbor Public Schools