

The ARPS Caregiver Connection

Issue No. 1 | September, 2025



The Purpose of The ARPS Caregiver Connection

The ARPS Caregiver Connection is a monthly newsletter that brings together updates from Amherst, Pelham, and the Regional Schools in one place. Its purpose is to strengthen the partnership between schools and families by sharing timely information, celebrating achievements, and providing insight into district initiatives. By keeping communication clear and consistent, we hope every caregiver feels informed, included, and connected to the work of our schools.



From the Desk of Dr. Xi

Greetings,



It's been a joy starting this new school year together! On the first morning, I walked through our schools and saw students eagerly greeting their teachers, helping each other find classrooms, and proudly sharing their new supplies. One student even stopped me in the hallway just to say how excited they were to be back with friends. It's those small but powerful moments that remind me why we do this work and how much our schools mean to our kids.

Every school year brings its own set of challenges, and that's true for all districts. What makes us stronger is how we come together to face them. I want to thank our staff for their tireless dedication, our teachers for the care they show our students every day, and our parents and caregivers for your patience, understanding, and support as we adjust to some new routines.

This year, I am also changing how communication flows directly from the district. When important updates happen, you will receive timely notices so you have the information you need without delay. Additionally, you will receive this monthly Caregiver Newsletter, which consolidates updates from all three districts in one place. My goal is to keep information clear, consistent, and accessible to all families.

At the core of this work is something more important than schedules or structures; it's about relationships. We're dedicated to building trust, strengthening connections, and growing together with you, our caring community of caregivers, students, staff, and partners. I truly believe that when we listen to each other and keep students at the forefront, we can accomplish amazing things.

I am excited for the journey ahead, grateful for the support around me, and confident that together we will continue to grow, learn, and shine.

With gratitude,



- 📖 National Literacy Month
- 🎒 Back to School Month
- 👧 National School Success Month
- 🌍 National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 – Oct. 15)
- 🧩 National Courtesy Month
- 📊 National Preparedness Month
- 🎵 Classical Music Month



September Educational & Monthly Celebrations

Key Days to Note in September

- Patriot Day – September 11
- International Literacy Day – September 8
- Constitution Day & Citizenship Day – September 17
- National Attendance Awareness Month
- International Day of Peace – September 21

- 🎃 National Principals Month
- 📖 National Book Month
- 👧 National Bullying Prevention Month
- 🧠 National ADHD Awareness Month
- ❤️ National Dyslexia Awareness Month
- 💻 National Cybersecurity Awareness Month
- 🌍 Global Diversity Awareness Month
- 🎨 National Arts & Humanities Month
- 🍏 Farm to School Month

Key Days to Note in October

- World Teachers' Day – October 5
- Indigenous Peoples' Day – October 14 (U.S. observance; varies locally)
- National Coming Out Day – October 11
- National Custodian Appreciation Day – October 2
- World Mental Health Day – October 10
- Unity Day (Bullying Prevention Awareness) – October 23
- World Food Day – October 16
- National Red Ribbon Week (Drug Prevention) – October 23–31
- Halloween – October 31



October Educational & Monthly Celebrations

Caregiver Code of Conduct

As caregivers, we're crucial partners in our children's education, and the way we support them helps define the culture of our schools. The Caregiver Code of Conduct lays out clear guidelines for how we communicate, collaborate, and set a good example, so every student, staff member, and family member feels valued and supported. These guidelines apply not just in our schools, but at all school-related events – including sports, performances, and extracurricular activities. How we behave in these settings matters because our kids are paying attention and learning from us.

You can view the full Caregiver Code of Conduct on our district website, and I encourage you to take a few minutes to read it. By working together with kindness, patience, and accountability, we can make sure that every student thrives in a safe and welcoming environment.



Key Expectations for Caregivers:

- Respect all students, staff, officials, and community members at school and school-sponsored events.
- Communicate constructively with teachers, coaches, and administrators to support student learning and well-being.
- Model positive behavior at athletics, performances, and community events.
- Collaborate as partners with the school to create safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for every child.





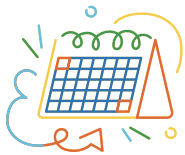
AMHERST K-6 RESTRUCTURING (COMMUNICATION STRATEGY, LEADERSHIP & STAFFING, LOGISTICS & FACILITIES, AND PROGRAM DESIGN):

Beginning in the 2026–2027 academic year, as an integral component of the Amherst K–6 Restructuring initiative, our district will operate two elementary institutions—namely, Crocker Farm Elementary and the newly consolidated Amherst Elementary School. Additionally, sixth-grade students will transition to a newly established school within the Middle School. This restructuring signifies a pivotal development for our community, necessitating meticulous planning, transparent communication, and effective leadership.

Communication

As we move forward with the K–6 Restructuring, open communication with families, students, and staff is essential. I will be hosting a series of listening sessions to hear directly from you, answer questions, and provide updates. Parent sessions will be held virtually via Zoom to make participation easier, and I will continue to use newsletters like this one to ensure information is shared widely and transparently. Together, these opportunities will help us stay connected and make this transition a collaborative process.

September Amherst Listening Session Dates



9/18: Parent Listening Session via Zoom at 5:30 pm

9/24: ARMS STAFF

9/24 & 9/25: 5th Grade Student Listening Sessions on 6th Grade Move

9/25: K-6 Staff Listening Session via Zoom

Leadership & Staffing:

With the announcement of Mr. Derek Shea's retirement, Principal of Crocker Farm, our district will enter a period of both reflection and renewal. Since my arrival, Derek has been someone I could depend on for insight, a model of transformational leadership, and a leader who consistently prioritized students and staff in every decision. His love for Crocker Farm and dedication to our children are unmistakable. Although Derek will officially retire during the 2026–2027 school year, he has graciously chosen to begin the year in a different capacity to ensure continuity of leadership during such a crucial transition. His knowledge, compassion, and steady presence will continue to guide us as we open the new elementary school and introduce the new 6th-grade program. We are deeply grateful for his service and the legacy he leaves within our community.

Leadership Selection Process

Looking ahead, we are fortunate to have two highly qualified leaders within our district who are prepared to step forward:

- Tammy (Principal, Fort River)
 - Over 20 years of service in Amherst, starting as a Special Education teacher.
 - Holds licenses in Special Needs PK–9 and as an Administrator.
 - Became Principal of Fort River in Fall 2022, guiding the school through a period of transition with steady, compassionate leadership.
 - Known for her transformative, evidence-based leadership, ensuring that instructional and cultural changes are based on research, best practices, and a commitment to equity.
- Allison (Principal, Wildwood)
 - Over 8 years of service in Amherst, beginning as a Special Education teacher at Wildwood.
 - Served as Assistant Principal starting in 2018 and became Principal in July 2023.
 - Holds licenses in Elementary 1–6, Moderate Disabilities, and as an Administrator.
 - Recognized for her expertise in restorative justice, respected leadership, and her ability to provide calm and strength during times of change.

Both Tammy and Allison have been invited to share their vision for leading Crocker Farm or the new elementary school. They will participate in an interview process that includes a reflective leadership task and a panel of teachers, School Committee members, and district leaders. I have the utmost trust in both leaders, and I am confident that through this process, Amherst will be well-positioned with strong leadership for years to come.

The announcement of new district leadership for Crocker Farm, the new Amherst Elementary School, and the 6th-grade center is scheduled for **September 15**. This process, while complex, is rooted in core values: ensuring all schools have the leadership they need, making decisions aligned with fiscal and programmatic realities, and always prioritizing students.

Logistics and Facilities:



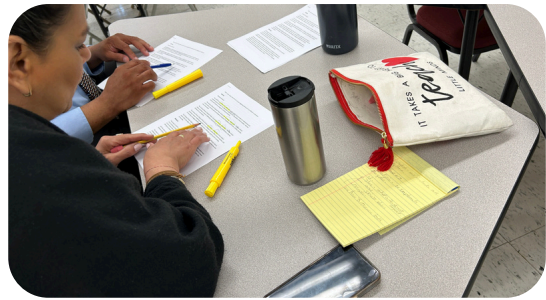
As part of the Amherst K–6 Restructuring, we are working carefully to ensure that our schools are ready to meet the needs of students now and in the future. While enrollment has declined in recent years, projections show that as early as 2027, we will begin to see an increase in student numbers. This growth means our buildings will be closer to full capacity, and it is important that we plan responsibly. To do so, we are reviewing class sizes, the impact of school choice, and the number of classrooms needed at each grade level so that we can continue to provide safe, supportive, and engaging learning environments for all children.

An important part of this planning is the transition of 6th graders to the middle school. We have identified a wing of the middle school building that will be repurposed to create a welcoming and developmentally appropriate space for them. To make sure this transition reflects the needs of those most directly affected, I will be meeting with 5th-grade students to listen to their questions, concerns, and ideas. Their voices will help guide our decisions and ensure that the new 6th-grade program is built with students at the center. At the same time, we will engage middle school staff to gather input and collaborate on the design, so that the transition supports both students and educators.

This work connects closely to redistricting. Our initial boundary maps were drawn using main roadways, but we are now revisiting them to also consider socio-economic balance and ensure equity across schools. Transportation impacts appear minimal so far, though adjustments may be needed once the revised boundaries are finalized.

To keep our community fully informed, on **September 16**, consultant Tim Ammon will present draft boundaries, enrollment projections, and related data to the Amherst School Committee. Families are encouraged to join the meeting virtually or watch the recording on YouTube. This presentation will help set the stage for future conversations and provide valuable information as we continue to plan together.

Program Design:



As we continue planning for the Amherst K–6 Restructuring, it is important to highlight that the educational program design was officially approved by the Amherst School Committee in 2021. This approved plan includes all specialized programs, as well as the Caminantes Dual Language Program, being housed in the new consolidated elementary school. Moving forward with this model provides consistency with the original vision, while ensuring that students will have access to a purpose-built facility designed to meet their academic and developmental needs.

The district leadership team has been actively working on the development of schedules to create smooth transitions and strong alignment across grade levels. A draft schedule has been created and shared, with the Grade 6 model currently under revision. Past program design models are also being used to provide context, and together with current needs and priorities, they are guiding discussions focused on instructional quality, equitable access, and operational feasibility.

Sixth Grade Program Design

A central feature of the restructuring is the establishment of a distinct 6th-grade program beginning in the 2026–2027 school year. Because the approved plan separates 6th grade from the elementary configuration, this program must follow a secondary school model and meet the 990 hours of structured learning time required by Massachusetts law. Importantly, this change reflects program design, not simply where students are housed. The new schedule will ensure that 6th graders experience an instructional program that is socially, emotionally, and academically sound.

Research on the integration of 6th grade into middle school models highlights both benefits and challenges. Studies show that 6th graders often benefit from access to content specialists, expanded academic opportunities, and exposure to world languages, arts, and social sciences earlier in their academic journey. These opportunities foster independence, broaden perspectives, and prepare students for the rigor of secondary school. At the same time, research also cautions that transitions at this age can be complex, requiring careful attention to students' social-emotional development, sense of belonging, and relationships with teachers. Our program design will intentionally address these factors, ensuring that students not only grow academically but also feel supported as they navigate this important stage of development.

Looking Ahead: Through this restructuring, Amherst's 6th graders will have new opportunities to engage in a rich academic program that goes beyond the traditional elementary experience. They will study with content-area teachers and have greater access to world languages, the arts, and the social sciences — while continuing to receive the supports they need to thrive socially and emotionally. By combining academic rigor with developmental support, our goal is to create a 6th-grade program that prepares students for long-term success while honoring the whole child.

Amherst-Pelham Middle School Schedule:

Over the past several weeks, our middle school staff have worked diligently to review and adjust student schedules so that every child's needs are reflected. This includes ensuring services for Special Education, English Language Learning, and 8th grade math placement. On Monday morning, September 15, students will receive their updated schedules, and Algebra and Pre-Algebra flex coursework will also begin that day.

To remain fully compliant with IEP service provisions, some families may receive additional communication from the Middle School or the Student Services Office if any amendments to their child's IEP are required. These notifications are part of our commitment to keeping families informed and ensuring that every student receives the services and supports they are entitled to.

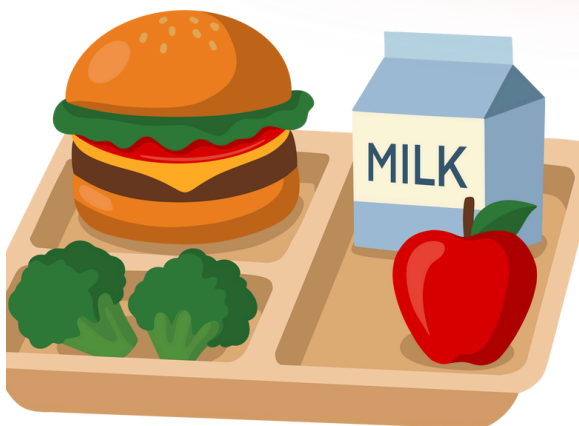
I want to thank our families for their patience as this work has been completed. Making sure each student has a schedule that is accurate, balanced, and supportive of their success is our top priority, and I am grateful to our staff for their dedication to getting this right for students.

Middle School Roof Project Update:

As we continue working with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to address the older sections of the Middle School roof, it is important for our community to know that one portion—the roof above the auditorium—does not qualify for the repair program.

On Tuesday, **September 23**, our Project Manager from Vertex will provide the Regional School Committee with an update on the Middle School Roof Project. I encourage parents and caregivers to tune in live or view the recording on our YouTube channel to stay informed.

School Lunch Menu Update:



Updated school menus are now available on the district website. At the high school, new dining stations — including a Global Station featuring diverse flavors — have been added to give students more variety and choice. We are also planning a public presentation on child nutrition, with a possible tasting event to engage and educate the community. More details will be shared soon.

ARPS Middle School Yellow Jacket Update:

Just before the start of the school year, a yellowjacket nest was found on the second-floor exterior of the middle school near rooms 26 and 27. To address the issue safely, Minuteman Pest Control treated the nest on Tuesday, August 27, using a botanical dust insecticide, a less-toxic method that takes a day or two to be fully effective.

By Friday, August 29, our Facilities Operations Manager, Adam, confirmed that the treatment worked and the nest had been completely removed. Our Facilities team will continue to monitor the area to make sure it remains safe for students and staff.

The safety and comfort of our students and staff are always our top priority, and we are grateful to our team for addressing this quickly and effectively.

31st Annual Trivia Bee:

Amherst Education Foundation's 31st Annual Trivia Bee Fundraiser.



Please join us on Monday, October 27 at 6:30pm at The Drake in downtown Amherst, for a fun event that will also have a raffle (you don't have to attend to enter) and refreshments. ARPS Superintendent Dr. Xi will return as this year's Trivia Bee emcee. All proceeds will go toward funding valuable education grants to public school teachers and staff in Amherst, Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury.

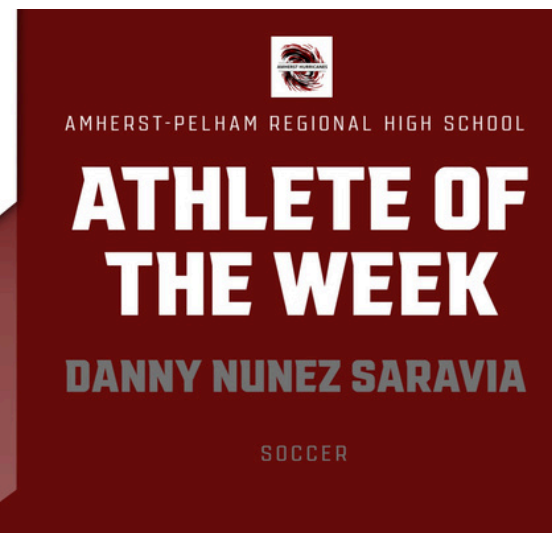
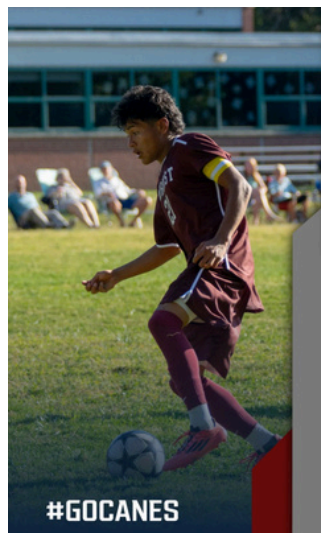
Put together a team and come play in support of our schools! (ages 15+ welcome)

Register Here: <https://ti.to/amherst-education-foundation/2025-tb>

To learn more about our grants go to amhersteducationfoundation.org/grants

Athletics and Sports Updates:

This week @ ARPS Athletics...Please continue to check ArbiterLive for updates.



Hispanic Heritage History Month:

As we enter the month of September, we join the nation in celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month—a time set aside each year from September 15 to October 15 to honor the histories, cultures, and countless contributions of Hispanic and Latino Americans. This is more than just a recognition on the calendar; it is an opportunity for us as a school community to pause, learn, and celebrate together.

In our schools across Amherst, Pelham, and the Region, we are intentional about creating spaces where every student feels seen, valued, and connected to the richness of our diverse community. Hispanic Heritage Month gives us the chance to highlight voices and traditions that have shaped our communities, our classrooms, and our country. It is also a chance for our students to engage in meaningful learning, celebrate stories and accomplishments, and reflect on how our shared histories strengthen who we are today.

Each of our schools will be celebrating in their own way—with events, activities, and learning opportunities that bring Hispanic culture and history to life for our students and families. From classroom read-ins to cultural showcases, these celebrations are about building connections and honoring the many ways Hispanic and Latino heritage has enriched our schools.

At Pelham Elementary School, one of the highlights will be the annual Hispanic Heritage Celebration and Read-In on Tuesday, October 14th, offered both in-person and virtually. Families and community members are warmly invited to participate as guest readers, storytellers, artists, musicians, or entertainers. The Read-In is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate Hispanic stories, voices, authors, and artists. For those joining in person, a bin of books will be available to choose from, and support will be provided for accessing online versions as needed. Participants are also welcome to bring a book of their own choice, or the Pelham team can gladly recommend one.

If you would like to participate in this year's event at Pelham, please reach out to Markyta Ables-Conyers at ablesm@arps.org or call 413-362-1100.

I encourage you to join us at Pelham's Read-In and to take part in the many celebrations happening across the three districts. Together, we can honor the diversity of voices that strengthen our schools and continue building communities where all cultures are celebrated.





First Day Events:

This year's First Day events were both exciting and successful! As Superintendent, it was a joy to attend in both Pelham and Amherst and to see our communities come together in such meaningful ways.

In Pelham, families gathered to meet teachers, classmates were introduced, and parents connected with one another. The turnout was strong, and the event served as a warm and welcoming introduction to the school year.

In Amherst, Kendrick Park was filled with the support of our community partners, including the Amherst Police Department, Amherst Fire Department, SEPAC, MPAC, and our Child Nutrition team. The event began with a sensory-friendly hour, included an introduction to the school bus (always a highlight for our youngest learners), and yes—there was ice cream!

I am excited to share that both events were successful in bringing educators, families, and community partners together to mark an important milestone—the start of a new school year. My heartfelt thanks to everyone who made these celebrations possible. I look forward to many more First Days with you as we continue this journey together.





Pelham Harvest Meal:

Harvest Supper & Howard D. Barnes Memorial Pie Auction

Join us for a traditional New England boiled dinner of corned beef, cabbage and vegetables catered by David Jean. While enjoying a dessert of apple crisp, bid on homemade pies auctioned off by Stan Rosenberg, whose wit and humor have delighted us for decades.

Purchase your tickets at the Pelham Library, Pelham Historical Society Museum or online at www.pelhamhistory.org. Tickets are now available (\$20 per adult and \$10 per child under 12).

Tickets must be purchased or reserved before September 20, 2025. We were sold out last year.

For more information, or to contribute a homemade pie, contact Susan Ashman at 413-427-6558.

