

The ARPS Caregiver Connection

Issue No. 3 | December 2025 Through February 2026



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

As we move through the winter months and begin the 2026 calendar year, I want to pause and share my sincere appreciation for the incredible staff, caregivers, and community members who make the Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public School Districts such a special place for our children.

There is a great deal moving across our district right now – from budget development conversations and staffing projections, to facilities planning, student support initiatives, academic programming, and long-term restructuring work. These are not small conversations. They require thoughtfulness, courage, transparency, and partnership. And through it all, our educators continue to show up every single day for students with dedication, compassion, and professionalism.

Our work is strongest when it is grounded in partnership. We deeply value engaging with caregivers and community members – whether through school committee meetings, caregiver forums, listening sessions, emails, or informal conversations at school events. Your voice matters. Your questions matter. Your advocacy matters. And even when conversations are difficult, they are important.

As we move into this new year, I also want to acknowledge that winter can be a season of reflection. For some in our community, it may also be a season marked by hardship, transition, or loss. It is our shared humanity – our kindness, empathy, and willingness to care for one another – that sustains us through challenging times. I continue to believe that how we treat one another in moments of pressure defines who we are as a district.

We remain committed to strengthening student safety and well-being, deepening inclusive practices, and ensuring fiscal responsibility while protecting the core of what makes our schools vibrant learning communities. There is still work ahead, and we will continue to communicate clearly and consistently as decisions unfold.

I wish you and your loved ones a healthy, safe, and restorative start to 2026. May this year bring moments of peace, renewal, and connection.

I look forward to staying engaged with you in the months ahead and in our next Caregiver Connection.

With gratitude,
Dr. Xi



Kanegasaki Japanese Students Visit Amherst, Massachusetts



“The Kanegasaki Exchange Program is an international partnership between the Amherst community and Kanegasaki, Japan. This exchange is designed to foster cross-cultural understanding, global awareness, and meaningful student-to-student connections. The program provides students with an authentic opportunity to learn about Japanese culture, daily life, and perspectives through direct interaction rather than solely through classroom study.

At its core, the program emphasizes curiosity, openness, and relationship-building. Students participate by engaging with visiting Japanese students through hosting experiences, shared activities, and cultural exchanges that help promote mutual learning and respect. The focus is intentionally accessible and inclusive, centering on a general interest in Japan rather than specialized academic prerequisites.

As the program continues, the long-term vision is to create a clear, sustainable pathway for student involvement, beginning with participation and hosting experiences and potentially extending to future travel opportunities. We are thoughtfully designing to grow at a manageable pace, making sure that structures, supports, and partnerships are in place to create positive, meaningful, and lasting experiences for students, families, and the broader school community.

The Kanegasaki Exchange Program reflects a shared commitment to cultural exchange, community partnership, and preparing students to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in an increasingly interconnected world.” - Tiffany McGee-Hickman, M.Ed., Ed.S.



Lead Testing Update – All School Sites Tested



As Superintendent of the Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public School Districts, I believe in keeping our community informed, especially when it comes to the health and safety of our students and staff.

Earlier this fall, our district voluntarily participated in the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Smart Water Lead Testing Pilot Program as a proactive step to assess our facilities ahead of new statewide regulations taking effect in 2027.

To date, all school sites have been tested.

Initial testing identified a limited number of fixtures at Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst Regional High School, and Pelham Elementary School with detectable lead levels above recommended thresholds. Any affected drinking or food-preparation fixtures were immediately shut down.

Corrective action plans are now in place and include:

- Removal or replacement of affected fixtures
- Installation of additional filtration systems where needed
- Replacement of hydration station filters
- Daily flushing protocols
- Use of cold water only for food and beverage preparation

Both MassDEP and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommend remediation of fixtures with test results above 1 part per billion (ppb), and we are fully aligned with this guidance.

Like many older buildings across the Commonwealth, trace levels can sometimes be detected due to aging plumbing components. Our early participation in this pilot program allowed us to identify concerns promptly and take immediate action well in advance of the 2027 requirements.

The health and safety of our students and staff remains our highest priority. We will continue to monitor, remediate, and retest as needed and will keep the community informed.

RESULTS



Monthly Neuro-Affirming Strategy: Parent Resources

In collaboration with SEPAC, I will be sharing monthly Neuro-Affirming Strategies with our staff as part of our ongoing commitment to creating inclusive, responsive environments for all students. I also want to ensure that our caregivers are included in this learning journey.

Neuro-affirming practices remind us that students learn, communicate, and engage in different ways – and that these differences are normal, valid, and deserving of respect. When we ground our schools in this understanding, we reduce stigma, strengthen belonging, and create classrooms where every learner feels seen, valued, and supported.

The resource we are sharing this month, developed by Inclusive Schooling, offers simple and practical reminders to help shift from deficit-based thinking to strength-based, student-centered approaches. I have included the parent link below so you may review it and consider how these mindset shifts can support conversations at home as well.

As we continue this work together, I am grateful for our partnership. Creating affirming environments for students requires collaboration between school and home, and I deeply appreciate your engagement and trust.

If you have questions about this work or would like to learn more, please do not hesitate to reach out to SEPAC.

Family Resources Link:

<https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/resources-for-families/>



New Elementary School Walkthrough

On Tuesday, December 9, 2025, officials from the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools (ARPS) were joined by members of the Amherst Town Council and the Amherst Town Manager for a guided walkthrough of the new elementary school currently under construction in Amherst. The new school is slated to open to students in Fall 2026.

The tour provided district and town leadership with an opportunity to view construction progress firsthand and to better understand how the building's design aligns with the educational vision and long-term needs of the community. Project leaders highlighted key aspects of the facility, including classroom layouts, shared learning spaces, and infrastructure designed to support both academic excellence and student well-being.

District leaders and town officials expressed appreciation for the collaborative efforts that have made the project possible and noted the importance of continued partnership as construction progresses. The new elementary school represents a significant investment in Amherst's students, families, and educators, and reflects a shared commitment to creating a modern, welcoming, and equitable learning environment.

As construction continues, ARPS and town leadership will remain engaged in monitoring progress to ensure the building is ready to welcome students and staff for the Fall 2026 opening.



ARPS Caregiver Code of Conduct

Introduction:

The Amherst, Pelham, and Amherst–Pelham Regional Public Schools (ARPS) are committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all students, staff, and families. This Caregiver Code of Conduct outlines our expectations for parents, guardians, and caregivers when interacting on school premises, at school-sponsored events, during transportation services, and in communications with staff, students, and other members of the school community. By adhering to these guidelines, we can work together to support student success and maintain a positive and productive school climate.

General Expectations:

Parents, guardians, caregivers, and other adults speaking on behalf of students should:

1. **Demonstrate Respect and Courtesy:** Treat all students, staff (including bus drivers and transportation staff), and fellow community members with respect and dignity in words, tone, and actions.
2. **Support a Safe Learning Environment:** Promote a safe and positive school environment by avoiding disruptive behavior, harassment, intimidation, or threats.

Examples of disruptive behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Yelling or speaking in an aggressive or threatening manner
- Interrupting instruction or meetings
- Refusing to follow staff directions or safety protocols
- Entering school spaces without permission or bypassing check-in procedures
- Using social media to intimidate or harass school community members

3. **Communicate Constructively:** Address concerns or conflicts in a respectful and solution-focused manner through the appropriate channels.

4. **Follow School Policies and Procedures:** Adhere to school rules, policies, and procedures, including visitor protocols and security measures.

5. **Model Appropriate Behavior:** Demonstrate civility and good sportsmanship at all school events, meetings, and activities.

Conduct on School Premises, at School-Sponsored Events, and During Transportation:

When on school grounds, attending school-sponsored activities, or engaging with school transportation services, parents, guardians, and caregivers are expected to:

- Comply with all school security procedures, including check-in protocols.
- Refrain from disruptive or inappropriate behavior, including yelling, using offensive language, or engaging in physical confrontations.
- Remain in authorized areas only and do not leave the main office without explicit permission from school personnel.
- Follow all staff directions and cooperate with school personnel, including bus drivers and transportation monitors.
- Refrain from using tobacco, alcohol, or drugs on school property, school buses, or at school events.
- Support and encourage positive participation in school functions.

Interactions with Students:

- Concerns about student behavior should be directed to school staff.
- Interactions with students should always be appropriate, respectful, and supportive.
- While on school grounds, parents should not be communicating with students other than their children about any school-related concerns, and shall not engage in retaliation, intimidation, or coercion of students who may be a witness or otherwise participating or anticipated to participate in a school investigation.

Interactions with Other Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers:

- Engage in respectful and productive communication.
- Avoid personal conflicts on school property or at school events.
- Refrain from spreading misinformation or engaging in disruptive behavior on social media related to the school community.

Interactions with School Employees:

- Treat teachers, administrators, staff, and transportation personnel with courtesy and respect.
- Schedule appointments for discussions rather than approaching staff during instructional time.
- Express concerns professionally and through the proper channels.
- Understand that school staff have the best interests of all students in mind and work within policies and regulations.

Addressing Concerns:

If a parent, guardian, or caregiver has a concern regarding a school-related matter, they should:

- Contact the appropriate teacher, staff member, or administrator in a respectful manner.
- Classroom or extracurricular activity concerns should only be brought to the school administration after the concerns have been raised directly with the teacher, staff member, director, or coach.
- Follow the school's communication protocols to resolve concerns.
- Avoid confrontational behavior or public disputes on school grounds, at events, or during student transportation.

Consequences of Violating the Code of Conduct:

Failure to adhere to this Code of Conduct may result in:

- A verbal or written warning.
- Restrictions on access to school property or events.
- A meeting with the school administration to discuss concerns.
- In cases involving school-sponsored athletic events or extracurriculars, **caregivers who are removed from an event due to misconduct may, in addition to other consequences, be suspended from attending future events for a specified number of games, typically no fewer than two, with the exact length determined by school administration based on a variety of factors, including the severity of the incident.**
- Legal action or involvement of law enforcement.

Conclusion:

We appreciate the partnership and involvement of parents, guardians, and caregivers in our schools. By working together respectfully and collaboratively, we can ensure a positive learning environment for all students. Thank you for your cooperation in upholding these standards.





Engaging in the Pelham Elementary School Budget Discussion

The Office of the Superintendent convened two parent forums in January 2026 to solicit community feedback regarding the future of Pelham Elementary School. Community input is essential to informing decisions and shaping the future direction of Pelham Elementary School. The School Committee's responsibility is to determine the District's annual budget. The Superintendent and her leadership team provide critical analysis and recommendations, the School Committee votes to approve the school budget and submits it to the Select Board and Finance Committee, and then Town Meeting votes on it.

We want to share the upcoming school committee meeting dates regarding the FY27 budget

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- **March 3 (5:30pm, Pelham Library in person + livestream)** – School Committee Meeting The budget will not be on the agenda at this meeting; other business to be conducted.
- **March 9 (6:30pm, virtual)** – Presentation of updated budget following recommendations made at the February 2 School Committee Meeting.
- **March 12 (6:30pm, virtual)** – Community Forum for School Committee to hear questions from the community.
- **March 26 (6:30pm, virtual)** – School Committee Budget Hearing.
- **April 7 (5:30pm, Pelham library in person + livestream)** – School Committee Meeting with the agenda to include voting a budget.
- **May 5 (5:30pm, Pelham Library in person + livestream)** – School Committee Meeting.
- **May 9 (9am)** Pelham Town Meeting.

You can get more information by contacting the office of the superintendent by calling 413-362-1818 or by emailing to officeofthesuperintendent@arps.org



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