The Andover Way:
A Culture of Learning,
Teaching and Leading.
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Our effectiveness in learning, teaching, and leading is amplified by the degree to which we are guided by a common culture — a culture reflected in our shared values, beliefs, vision, mission, goals, and strategies. This culture unifies us. It is intentional. We work every day to build and strengthen it. It brings us together to solve problems, and it encourages us to celebrate our mutual accomplishments. Without an identifiable culture, the Andover Public Schools (APS) would be just a collection of disparate schools and staff, each going in a different direction, lacking common purpose and the strength that derives from collegial action.

Most of us in APS have a sense of what this common culture entails. We know what our district and our community value and we are committed to helping every student achieve high standards. Yet it is important that we be able to describe this culture, to express it in words in order to better express it in deed. What do we believe and what values do we espouse? What specific outcomes do we envision for our students and how will we help them attain those outcomes?

Before we can answer those questions, we as the staff of APS should pause to acknowledge the deep passion that inspires our commitment to the work each of us is engaged in on behalf of our students. We believe in our students, we believe in each other, and we believe in the value of public education. We work every day to create and nurture a caring classroom community that will be the ideal setting for learning, teaching, and leading. Pervading this environment is a climate that commits us to continuous action and moves us ever closer toward achieving our outcomes. It is this climate, this culture that leads us to make the following commitment to our APS students.
COMMITMENT
WE WON’T STOP until all students...
FEEL safe, connected, confident, valued and honored for their uniqueness.
THINK globally, deeply, creatively, and take ownership of their learning.
BELIEVE they can achieve their goals and their growth is unlimited.
KNOW they are the center of a collaborative team of caring adults.
SHOW PRIDE to be part of the APS community.

Our culture is the mirror that we hold up to every major decision to ensure that our choices reflect who we are and who we are striving to become. The components of our district culture are like interlocking puzzle pieces, each one contributing to the whole, adding meaning to the overall picture, and giving strength to the adjoining pieces. Individually, the pieces include our core values, beliefs, vision, mission, goals, and strategies. Let’s consider each piece in turn.

Our core values have been part of the APS philosophy for many years. In fact, they were accepted practice long before they were ever identified in words. These values—high achievement for all, teaching excellence, innovation, collaboration, respect and responsibility — are the underlying principles that unite us, affecting the way we communicate and interact with each other. They apply equally to everyone, including learners, teachers, and leaders. The longevity of these values has probably contributed to their being almost second nature to district staff. However, they remain critical elements of our overall culture and we should be aware of them as our daily work unfolds.
Whereas our core values are accepted almost universally by a wide range of audiences, our beliefs are convictions that we in APS hold. Beliefs arise from our experiences—what we have seen, heard, read, discussed and deduced over time.

We must choose and articulate our beliefs with great care, because not everyone will agree with them. Acted upon, our beliefs shape our attitudes toward students, parents, and colleagues. They support and empower us to move forward toward achieving our goals, and they guide decision making at every level of the organization. Taken together, our core values and our beliefs constitute the why of our everyday work; they motivate us and inspire us to continually seek new and better ways to educate our students.

**STATEMENTS OF BELIEF**

We believe . . .

• All students can learn and reach their potential.
• Children learn what they live.
• Schools and community work together to prepare students to contribute positively to a democratic society and world community.
• Learning is a continuum that occurs inside and outside school and takes many forms.
• Clearly defined standards, benchmarks, and performance expectations promote success.
• Each student should be prepared to contribute to an increasingly multi-faceted, multi-cultural society and workplace.
• School staff are leaders and innovators in education and are positive role models.
• School programs must be flexible.
• Services and programs should be designed for the benefit of the learners, not the convenience of the providers.
With our Core Values and our Statements of Belief as the foundational principles of the way we operate, we turn to the **Vision** of what we want to accomplish. Since a vision by definition focuses on the future, our vision focuses on the students who will one day walk across a stage and receive their Andover diplomas. But what kind of students do we want to graduate from our district? What outcomes do we wish for them? How do we want them to present themselves to the world?

In APS, we strive to prepare students who recognize the value of both formal and informal education and who will pursue learning throughout their lives as a means of enriching their personal and professional experiences.

Knowing that their future will be challenging, we want our students to be well equipped with the intellectual and interpersonal skills to tackle problems and to persevere until they succeed. Perhaps most important of all, we envision our graduates as active and contributing citizens who value our increasingly diverse society and whose decisions are grounded in a strong system of ethics that extends to all facets of their lives.

In order to attain that vision in the future, we must turn our current attention to the building blocks that need to be in place today. These building blocks, these steps toward the future, constitute our **Mission**.

**VISION**

*We will prepare all students to . . .*

- Be lifelong learners able to pursue their personal and professional goals.
- Face adversity and ambiguity with intellectual skill, open-mindedness, adaptability, courage and confidence.
- Make informed, just and ethical decisions.
- Be connected and compassionate citizens who contribute to a diverse and global society.
And our mission as a district is to provide the learning opportunities and support that enable every student to develop the skills necessary to graduate and move forward to succeed in postsecondary education, employment, and other facets of adult life. These skills cover a broad range of areas and they apply to every student at every grade level.

First and foremost, we strive to ensure that every student demonstrates continual growth and proficiency in the academic content areas that are foundational to all learning. Next, we want every student to acquire key cognitive skills—to be an effective communicator, a critical thinker, and a collaborative team member. Throughout their years in Andover, we encourage all students to take charge of their own learning, to set goals and overcome challenges to reach them, and to objectively evaluate their own progress. Finally, we accept as part of our mission our responsibility to raise students’ level of awareness and appreciation with respect to other persons and cultures and to foster students’ sense of civic commitment to help make the world a better place for all.

**MISSION**

*We will provide every student with opportunities and support to...*

- Demonstrate academic growth in foundational content and skills.
- Communicate effectively, think critically, problem solve creatively, work collaboratively, and evaluate objectively.
- Be self-directed and persevering agents of their own learning.
- Demonstrate cultural awareness, an appreciation of self, empathy toward others, a sense of responsibility, and commitment to civic engagement.

Taken together, our vision and our mission constitute the WHAT of our work; they help us to focus on the priorities and activities that should consume the bulk of our time, attention, energy, and resources.

With the core values and beliefs forming the **why** of our daily work, and with the vision and the mission providing the **what**, the next piece is the **how**. How we will achieve our vision and our mission is the focus of our **goals**, which serve as signposts for the direction and steps we must undertake. The unifying theme of these goals is that they are accomplished most fully, efficiently, and effectively when they are tackled in collaboration with our entire district team. No single person—learner, teacher, or leader—has all of the skills, knowledge, perspectives, and insights that a team of people can bring to bear on a task. Our students benefit to the highest degree when all staff, parents, and community members work in unison to achieve our common goals. First among those goals is the provision of safe school environments that support students’ wellbeing. Next, we want to provide a rigorous
WHEN we collaborate to . . .

• Create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students’ academic growth and their social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

• Ensure that every student engages in a rigorous curriculum that is implemented consistently within and across schools.

• Provide inclusive instruction that engages every student in authentic learning experiences, demonstrates the power of effective effort and fosters inquiry, creativity and positive risk taking.

• Monitor student progress diagnostically and plan instruction after thorough and thoughtful data analysis to ensure each student reaches proficiency . . .

Viewed in their entirety, our Goals, Mission, and Vision provide the framework of what we want to achieve and how we plan to get there. We call this framework our Theory of Action.

THEORY OF ACTION

WHEN we collaborate to . . .

• Create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students’ academic growth and their social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

• Ensure that every student engages in a rigorous curriculum that is implemented consistently within and across schools.

• Provide inclusive instruction that engages every student in authentic learning experiences, demonstrates the power of effective effort and fosters inquiry, creativity and positive risk taking.

• Monitor student progress diagnostically and plan instruction after thorough and thoughtful data analysis to ensure each student reaches proficiency . . .
THEN all students will . . .
• Demonstrate academic growth in foundational content and skills;
• Communicate effectively, think critically, problem solve creatively, work collaboratively, and evaluate objectively.
• Be self-directed and persevering agents of their own learning; and
• Demonstrate cultural awareness, an appreciation of self, empathy toward others, a sense of responsibility, and commitment to civic engagement . . .

SO THAT all students are prepared to . . .
• Be lifelong learners able to pursue their personal and professional goals;
• Face adversity and ambiguity with intellectual skill, open-mindedness, adaptability, courage and confidence
• Make informed, just and ethical decisions; and
• Be connected and compassionate citizens who contribute to a diverse and global society.
Our Theory of Action outlines the actions we believe we need to take in order to have the impact we desire. It is presented in a simple format of “When we take these actions, then we expect to have these results, so that we reach our desired outcomes.” The “when” statements represent what we believe is the most critical work that needs to be done to achieve our ends. The “then” statements represent the mission of the district in terms of results we anticipate. The “so that” statements represent a larger vision statement of the kind of long-term impact we expect from our work. For example, “when” we as educators, parents, and community collaborate to provide every student with rigorous and meaningful learning experiences, “then” students will achieve academic proficiency “so that” they are propelled toward success in their adult lives.
The four collaborative goals deserve in-depth attention because they are at the heart of the work we will undertake in the foreseeable future. The strategies we select to achieve these goals will be the ones we determine to be the most effective in building quality classrooms and quality instruction. It is worth noting that all of these goals and strategies are grounded in collaborative practice. For generations, teaching was largely a solo endeavor, where it was up to the individual teacher to ensure students learned the content. Schools were essentially designed as collections of one-room schoolhouses. The new era of teaching must be collaborative, where teachers build on each other’s talents and skills. In this model, teachers work together to design lessons, review student work, and strategize about appropriate instructional adjustments and interventions for particular students. Instead of teaching students in isolation from each other, teachers of the same grade level or subject matter share responsibility for all students, ensuring that every child succeeds. Teamwork makes the profession far less lonely, far more engaging, and far more effective.

Research indicates that classroom culture and climate affect learning as dramatically as the academic curriculum does, and that a strong foundation of social and emotional safety supports academic progress. Therefore, teachers must be as thoughtful in structuring the social environment as in preparing academic lessons. When schools create an environment that builds interdependence, compassion and empathy, students feel safe while they learn. Surrounded by a caring network of peer support, students are better able to concentrate on academic work, take risks without fearing failure, and make faster progress.

**GOAL 1**
Create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students’ academic growth and their social, physical and emotional wellbeing.
Every student deserves to encounter subject matter that is challenging and purposeful. Parents need to have confidence that their children will be presented with a rigorous curriculum, regardless of which school they attend or which teacher is providing the instruction. District-wide consistency in curricular materials and teacher expectations also promotes professional collaboration and parental engagement in students' academic activities.

GOAL 2
Ensure that every student engages in a rigorous curriculum that is implemented consistently within and across schools.

Students are not empty vessels into which we pour knowledge, and learning is not rote memorization. Students must interact with the material and experience a connection to what they are learning. Instructionally, this means framing questions, setting learning objectives that motivate students to explore material, and designing activities where students solve problems, consider diverse perspectives and demonstrate deep understanding in multiple ways. Authentic learning engages students in the collaborative creation of products or solutions that require extended focus over time, match the complex real-world tasks and investigations of professionals in practice, and integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines.

GOAL 3
Provide inclusive instruction that engages every student in authentic learning experiences demonstrates the power of effective effort and fosters inquiry, creativity and positive risk taking.

Clearly, teachers need to know their subject matter at a deep level. Beyond content, however, effective teaching is about the continuous study of the students in the classroom, exploring what they understand and don’t understand, and finding ways to bridge the gap. Taking a diagnostic approach means listening carefully to class discussions, analyzing students’ mistakes, using assessments to monitor progress, and asking questions that reveal how students arrive at their answers.
Teachers need to review student work, analyze assessment results and plan interventions that increase students’ grasp of the material. We base our content on the curriculum, but our teaching strategies spring from the detailed diagnoses of students’ understanding and from the unshakable belief that all children can and will learn.

**GOAL 4**

Monitor student progress diagnostically and plan instruction after thorough and thoughtful data analysis to ensure each student reaches proficiency.

These four goals—creating caring classroom communities, providing curriculum that is rigorous and consistent across schools, offering instruction that is inclusive, engaging and data based, and taking a diagnostic approach to monitoring student progress—are addressed daily through an intentional process of collaborative practice in order to promote continuous improvement and a positive district culture. By concentrating our efforts and resources on the accomplishment of these goals, we can ensure that students leave high school with not just a diploma but with the academic skills, interpersonal confidence, and joy in learning that will propel them toward success in post-secondary education and careers.

To achieve each of these goals, we must deepen our approach to the HOW by explicitly defining the specific actions or strategies that we as a district team will undertake in the next few years. Following are the strategies we have proposed in order to move forward in attaining each goal.
Goals and Strategies

GOAL 1
Create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students’ academic growth and their social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

• Provide leadership to support social emotional learning (SEL) with the goal of establishing a shared understanding of the importance of creating a community where students feel connected.
• Evaluate the current PK-12 SEL programming and establish measures to assess and ensure consistency of SEL implementation.
• Provide professional development and coaching in SEL, culturally responsive teaching and growth mindset in order to implement an approach embedded in the daily life of the classroom and the school.
• Examine the needs of students with significant mental health and/or behavioral challenges and make recommendations for tiered support.
GOAL 2

Ensure that every student engages in a rigorous curriculum that is implemented consistently within and across schools.

• Define and demonstrate rigor within the context of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
• Maintain the five-year curriculum review cycle.
• Monitor curriculum, district assessments, and programs for continuous and consistent delivery.
• Where appropriate, thoughtfully transition from print format to balanced accessible educational materials and digital instructional resources.

GOAL 3

Provide inclusive instruction that engages every student in authentic learning experiences, demonstrates the power of effective effort and fosters inquiry, creativity and positive risk taking.

• Enhance instruction to consistently integrate shared cultural arts learning, field work, internships/externships, and other experiential learning strategies.
• Integrate technology and innovation to enhance teaching and learning.
• Document and showcase best student-centered practices such as differentiation, choice, project-based learning, inquiry, etc. Through collaborative observations, professional development, and professional learning groups.
• Provide consistent implementation and support of collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and co-teaching models for teachers designed to optimize instruction that is inclusive, accessible and challenging for all students.
GOAL 4
Monitor student progress diagnostically and plan instruction after thorough and thoughtful data analysis to ensure each student reaches proficiency.

- Provide professional development for educators focusing on progress monitoring, the documentation of learning, and error analysis to enable teachers to provide meaningful next-step feedback to support student progress.
- Develop consistent research-based universal screening, early indicators, and progress monitoring systems; common grade-level and subject area assessments, and data analysis tools to maximize the utility of district and state data.
- Establish regularly scheduled data meetings at each school and at the district level, supported by all stakeholders.
- Implement ways to effectively communicate student progress to families.

If these goals and strategies sound ambitious, it is because our students deserve no less. And since we are committed to moving forward, the challenge that now confronts us is how to go about accomplishing the work we have outlined for ourselves. It is important to understand that the way we approach our professional work should reflect our common values and beliefs. If we truly believe that collaboration, engagement, innovation, and authentic learning are key to effective learning by students, then we should model those same practices as we work on our own work. In this way, our daily practice demonstrates and gives voice to our values and beliefs as a district.
Traditionally, school districts have developed long-range plans that outline how their goals and strategies will be achieved over a timeline of three to five years. However, as technological advances, society’s expectations, and students’ career needs have begun evolving at an ever-faster rate, five-year plans have become anachronistic. They no longer meet our needs or serve our purposes. Accordingly, we in APS have turned to an approach that was first adopted by high-tech companies to respond to rapidly changing environments. That approach is known as “agile strategic planning.”

Agile strategic planning is very different from traditional strategic planning. Rather than developing a long-range plan with specific goals and action steps laid out across the years, agile planning begins with more general targets and “sprints,” which are the first steps in a series of actions that will achieve the goal. Instead of having rigid and isolated tasks assigned to individuals, each sprint in an agile plan is undertaken by a team and is designed to build on the district’s existing work while moving forward aggressively. This approach does not overwhelm us with new initiatives but instead focuses our energy on the few strategic actions that will have the most immediate and beneficial impact. As the sprint unfolds, the team reviews its progress, assesses its impact on the larger goal, identifies what success will look like at the end of the sprint, makes adjustments to improve the likelihood of success, and upon closure recommends next steps.

In other words, agile strategic planning is in itself a creative endeavor and one that promotes collaboration and an evolving process of solving problems. The object is to remain flexible in pursuit of the target while taking manageable, time-limited steps toward that target.
Throughout the process of agile development, the focus is on the target but the work is broken down to enhance the opportunity for success. In addition, because we are not locked into a rigid agenda, agile development allows for “just-in-time” adjustments and changes based on the analysis of progress and impact. We have chosen to adopt agile strategic planning because it supports our professional implementation of the same effective learning strategies we want our students to develop. We believe that this open-ended pursuit of targets—incorporating innovation, engagement, collaboration, and authentic learning—has the strongest likelihood of inspiring all members of the APS staff and of engaging their commitment toward accomplishing our goals.

Accordingly, the strategies listed under the four goals above have been incorporated into the agile strategic planning document that is in turn based upon our Theory of Action. As we strive to achieve these goals, we will be guided, strengthened, and unified by our Andover culture and especially by the commitment we have made to our students that...

“We Won’t Stop!”
WE WON'T STOP UNTIL ALL STUDENTS

Feel
SAFE, CONNECTED, CONFIDENT, VALUED AND HONORED FOR THEIR UNIQUENESS

Think
GLOBALLY, DEEPLY, CREATIVELY, AND TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR LEARNING

Believe
BELIEVE THEY CAN ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AND THEIR GROWTH IS UNLIMITED

Know
THEY ARE THE CENTER OF A COLLABORATIVE TEAM OF CARING ADULTS

Show Pride
TO BE PART OF THE APS COMMUNITY

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS