

# Wayland Public Schools

## Superintendent's Entry Report



Credit: WSPN

Arthur Unobskey, Superintendent

February 5, 2018

## Introduction and Executive Summary

When I became Superintendent in July, I began a study of the District, its obvious and its lesser-known strengths, and areas where it could improve. I met with district and building-based administrators, teachers both individually and in groups, staff in other Town departments, and parents and students. I conducted surveys\*, observed dozens of classes, and read several documents that quantified and described the impact of the Wayland Public Schools on its students. These meetings occurred throughout the day and evening to ensure that all interested stakeholders could participate. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the Superintendent's surveys, I met with groups of administrators, teachers, parents and students to help me interpret the surveys and put those responses in the larger context of the District's efforts over the last several years. This report is a summary of that learning process.

In the first part of this report, I detail how the Wayland Public Schools provide a strong platform for our students' academic success and their social-emotional health. I have discovered that teachers feel that their community supports them in the initiatives they take to meet the needs of their students. In addition, the district has developed a framework over the last few years, the UNITED priorities, which has focused building-based and short- and long-term initiatives under a single umbrella. After reviewing some of the specific aspects of this strong base, this report explores areas that are particularly ripe for continued growth because of teacher and parent interest, state and national trends, and, most importantly, continued student need. These areas are (in no particular order): the study of world languages, civic engagement, writing, student transitions between school levels, the study of social studies and history, social-emotional health, the full support of the academic achievement of our METCO students, personalized learning, the use of data to track student progress, and the improvement of the functionality and cleanliness of school facilities.

Now that I have produced these findings, I will work with the community between now and June to gauge their response to these findings and to build a shared sense of urgency around two to three District-wide goals that we will strive to fulfill by 2021. I am excited about the next step in our work together. Please contact me at any time if you have questions, comments or thoughts at [arthur\\_unobskey@wayland.k12.ma.us](mailto:arthur_unobskey@wayland.k12.ma.us).

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### \* Survey Respondent Information

Elementary parents: 310 (out of 1228 students enrolled), High School parents: 183 (out of 860 students enrolled)  
Middle School parents: 170 (out of 639 students enrolled), Wayland Public School Teachers and Teaching Assistants: 167 (out of a staff of 373), High School students: 730 (out of 860 students), Middle School students: 295 (out of 639 students enrolled)

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# The Purpose of this Entry Report

## Deepening the Implementation of the UNITED Priorities

Early in the process of this research, I determined that it made more sense to deepen, rather than revise, the District's thoughtful conceptual framework for meeting the needs of its students. The UNITED framework, derived from priorities that stakeholders developed at the School Summit in 2015, was refined into its current form in 2016. This framework not only identifies the long-term learning priorities for Wayland students but provides a description of the actions that the District should take to achieve those priorities. The District-wide UNITED priorities are articulated as follows:

### Using Data Wisely

To strengthen the achievement of each learner through ongoing access to and use of data so that resources (*funding, staffing and time*) are allocated efficiently, accurately and effectively.

### Nurturing Early Childhood Development

To nurture early childhood development by fostering community structures and support services to meet the growing social, emotional, and educational needs of the children and families in Wayland.

### Infusing Technology and Design

To infuse technology and design throughout the curriculum with an emphasis on students building the skills they need to solve real world problems as they create, model and learn.

### Training Global Citizens

To train students to be productive global citizens of their country, nation and world able to demonstrate requisite skills, which include civility and cultural proficiency.

### Elevating Achievement

To utilize existing systems of structured support and engagement in combination with new initiatives to elevate the academic achievement of all students.

### Deepening Wellness

To deepen and strengthen students' wellness education by employing a systemic approach to curriculum, instruction, extra-curricular activities, school culture and safety.



## Deepening the Implementation of the UNITED Priorities (continued)

With the UNITED framework already in place, the District's next step should be to identify particular areas in which to focus its efforts over the next few years. The expectation is that conversations subsequent to this report will yield these short-term, district-wide goals.

More specifically, between now and June of 2018, the Administrative Council (the Building and Central Office Leadership Team) will work closely with staff, parents, students, and the Community to identify two to three district-wide teaching and learning goals that we plan to achieve by June of 2021. While schools will continue to initiate their own building-specific goals, the district-wide strategic goals will require regular inter-school collaboration and district-wide professional development.

In June of 2018, the Administrative Council will present these goals to School Committee for their approval. Assuming they are approved, we will regularly evaluate our progress towards meeting these goals at subsequent meetings. These goals will be concrete, with clear action steps, benchmarks and measurable outcomes. The Administrative Council's belief is that if we achieve these goals, we will grow the significant strengths of the Wayland Public Schools, giving our children the skills to deal with a challenging present and to chart a satisfying future.



## Strengths

### A Community Engaged and Excited about School

Of those who responded to the written surveys, ninety-five percent of elementary parents, ninety-six percent of middle school parents, and **seventy-five percent of high school parents** said that they agreed or strongly agreed that “my child enjoyed school.” Ninety-six percent of middle school students felt welcomed at their school. Eighty-eight percent of high school students felt that there was someone at the high school who they “trusted.”

The MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, the region’s major student health survey, and which has been administered by the District every two years since 2006, also portrays a safe and supportive environment at the Middle and High School. Between 2006 and 2016, Wayland Middle School students have reported a significant decline in bullying, with a reduction of those who had experienced bullying “in the last twelve months” from 33.7% to **17.4%**. (On this survey, bullying was defined as “when 1 or <sup>~100</sup> more students tease, threaten, spread rumors, hit, shove, or hurt another student over and over again.”) The percentage of students experiencing bullying, furthermore, was significantly lower than at middle schools in the Metrowest region in which 25.1% of students reported a bullying experience in the previous twelve months. At Wayland **High School**, bullying incidents were also lower than they were regionally, with **15.7% of students experiencing bullying** compared to 20.8% regionally. **15% = 129**

In addition, parents were confident in the rigor of the experiences that their children were receiving. Over ninety percent of K-12 families felt that their children were “engaged and challenged” by the reading, writing and math experiences of their children. Finally, ninety-nine percent of the District’s K-12 teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that they “enjoyed [their] job.”

### Praise for Teachers

Interview and survey respondents most frequently mentioned the teaching staff as the most important strength in the Wayland Public Schools. Teachers were praised for their professionalism and dedication, as well as their skill. In Wayland, teachers help students not only to succeed in their particular classroom but also help them prepare for future success. One parent wrote, “Great transition from elementary to middle school. Opportunity to stay for math help. Excellent teachers.” Parents in Wayland see teachers as more than educators but as nurturers of their young children. One parent wrote, “Can’t say enough good things about [their teachers] and how much our children care for them and enjoy learning in their classrooms!” In my one-to-one meetings with parents, I heard repeatedly about students who stayed in touch with their teachers after high school. A few different parents recounted how their college children would even call their former teachers to ask for nighttime help on essays. In my focus group with current high school students, furthermore, the students offhandedly mentioned how they frequently email teachers for help and are somewhat surprised when they don’t hear back within a few hours. Clearly, Wayland students often have close, nurturing relationships with their teachers.

## Praise for Teachers (continued)

In my personal observations, I have regularly observed highly effective and innovative teaching. To save space, I will cite only a few examples in which I have seen teachers having great impact. At the tri-annual data elementary meetings among grade-level colleagues, for example, the teachers' knowledge of their students reflects their intense focus on the children's social-emotional as well as their academic needs. At these meetings, where teachers assign students to certain groups for activities in math and reading, the self-assured and candid nature of the conversations among teachers have impressed me. The teachers are unselfconscious in assigning each other to certain roles, focusing on maximizing their impact, taking advantage of their teaching strengths and their specific relationships with students to create the most effective groupings. World language teachers at the middle school, meanwhile, have removed tables and chairs; sitting students on cushions on the floor. They focus students on talking to each other in the new language. Even Latin is full-immersion. For an entire department to focus its energies on a particularly demanding mode of inquiry requires deep collaboration among teachers. Furthermore, the high school teachers have balanced their innovative spirit with respect for the rigor of their disciplines. For example, the high school math department continues to pour significant energy into refining its most conceptually rigorous classes (such as BC Calculus) while creating more substantial forays into applied math, such as its new probability unit in geometry and its expanding number of statistics offerings.



Credit: WSPN

## High Achievement

Wayland students perform very well on quantitative assessments of their skills. On statewide assessments, including the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), ninety-nine percent of tenth grade students scored proficient or advanced on the reading test while ninety-five percent scored proficient or advanced on the math assessment.



Credit: WSPN

Not only have Wayland schools significantly outperformed the average student scores in the state, Wayland students gained above-average growth in 2017 as compared to students throughout Massachusetts. Given a median growth percentile of 50 for students throughout the state, I have cited below the “growth” scores for Wayland students on the MCAS Spring 2017 test. One can see that Wayland students not only typically bring considerable skill to the classroom in the fall, but also progress faster than average throughout the school year. (Please keep in mind that these growth scores give an incomplete picture, only capturing one year of growth. District growth scores will be far more meaningful after the state has given the new MCAS test for a number of years, allowing us to look at a number of different cohorts of children.) This table uses Sudbury, Weston, and Wellesley, with their similar student demographics and proximity, to compare student growth on the MCAS.

## High Achievement (continued)

Grade Level	Wayland Math 2017	Sudbury Math 2017	Wellesley Math 2017	Weston Math 2017	Wayland English 2017	Sudbury English 2017	Wellesley English 2017	Weston English 2017
4	55.0	65.0	54.0	64.5	51.0	71.0	63.0	69.0
5	74.0	58.0	60.0	56.0	68.0	47.0	57.0	37.0
6	69.0	21.0	55.0	49.0	66.0	34.0	55.0	35.0
7	54.0	42.0	73.0	68.0	68.0	45.5	60.0	69.0
8	76.0	38.0	60.0	46.5	68.0	66.0	50.0	55.0

\*This growth measurement is formally called Student Growth Percentile (SGP) and is the median SGP of all students at that grade level. It groups each student into achievement “bands” by their scores the previous year and places them between the 1st percentile (lowest) and the 99th percentile (highest) based on their scores in the current year. (Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

In addition, the Wayland High School students scored well on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test, one of the two most common standardized tests for students applying to college.) Below are the combined scores on the SAT relative to comparable districts:

### 2017 SAT Average Scores

District	Reading SAT 2017	Writing SAT 2017	Math SAT 2017
Wayland	595	593	619
Lincoln-Sudbury	577	572	610
Wellesley	601	598	614
Weston	604	603	627

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

# High Achievement (continued)

Another comparison that reflects well on Wayland’s performance on standardized tests is the high percentage of high school students who score proficient or higher on the Advanced Placement (AP) tests, a College Board assessment of a students’ ability to do college-level work. The chart below shows the percentage of students that scored proficient or higher on AP tests (scores from “3” to “5”).

## 2017 Percentage Scoring Proficient on Advanced Placement Tests

District	English	History	Math	Science	World Languages
Wayland	100.0%	90.0%	84.9%	99.0%	94.3%
L-S	90.9%	87.5%	97.7%	96.1%	96.2%
Wellesley	95.5%	95.8%	86.1%	98.0%	100.0%
Weston	96.0%	80.6%	76.3%	91.3%	94.1%

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education





## Strong Support for the Arts

In conversations and focus groups, parents clearly articulated a passionate belief that the district must maintain its outstanding arts opportunities, both visual and performing, at all school levels. One parent described the music program as, “remarkable...across all grades.” Many spoke about how a certain drama teacher or visual art teacher provided the highlight of their child’s day, often making the early morning trek to school palatable. Arts classes impact broad swaths of students, not only ones who are passionate about art. At the elementary level, for example, over eighty percent of student chose to participate in the optional third grade strings program in 2017, and over seventy percent of students participate in either band or strings in fourth and fifth grade. More anecdotally, when I visited a ninth grade introductory visual arts class, all of the students could explain the goals of their project in a serious manner, despite the fact that many of them would not describe themselves as serious art students.



Credit: WSPN



Credit: WSPN

## **A Shared Belief in Serving the Whole Child**

As a district that prides itself on its high academic standards, it was striking how important it was to parents that Wayland schools play a central role in their child's social-emotional health. One parent wrote: "When we were researching towns to live in, we were struck by how few comments centered around competitiveness at the HS, but first around community, with perhaps a mention that of course it is competitive. Healthy competition in a supportive environment is good." Parents also repeatedly expressed appreciation for the anti-bullying curricula and efforts that staff make to address bullying. One middle school parent expressed that she "really like[d] the [Principal's] attitude when it comes to providing a safe and comfortable learning environment and her occasional emails about making sure students do not make each other feel bad (bullying, not wearing birthday t-shirts so others are excluded), etc."

Parents expressed a strong desire to broaden the academic opportunities of children as a way to make school more enjoyable and satisfying. One wrote, "I have a senior at WHS who is academically strong and a freshman who is struggling. I think the well-worn path from WHS to 4-year liberal arts colleges is adequately highlighted. But it would be nice for students to also be able to see a different kind of model for their future that is equally valid -- for example, how a Wayland HS education could fit in with a career and technical education or path in the future...some different kinds of young WHS alumni do a panel for sophomores and juniors that opens up students' minds to different paths they can take in the future that depart from the typical get-into-a-good-college-and-everything-will-be-fine message that is so prevalent. Because for those students who are bright and curious yet feel they won't get into a 'good college' (and the status-y nature of that whole process is crazy at WHS as it is everywhere), they may feel like losers in that game and need to be shown there are many, many other paths they can go on." In other words, because students need multiple paths to success, staff and parents agree that student engagement is a central driver of course offerings and teaching approaches.

## **Parent Involvement as a Means to Serve the Whole Child**

Parents connected their involvement in the life of their child's school as a way to smooth their child's developmental ups and downs. They also saw it as a way to build coherence between the values expressed in home and school. Parents felt that the schools supported these efforts. For example, the Early Childhood Coordinator works with parents providing town-wide coordination for the special education services students need beginning at three years old. Continuing into elementary school, ninety-two percent of elementary parents expressed that they felt "welcomed in the school." Eighty percent of parents felt that the elementary principals "[valued] their opinion" while eighty-five percent felt that the teachers did; at the middle school level, parents felt that 83% of teachers and 77% of administrators "valued their opinion" and in high school the numbers were 52% of teachers and 62% of administrators. Perhaps as proof that parents naturally kept a greater distance as children got older, 36% of high school parents responded that they did not know if teachers valued their opinion.

While most parents wanted as much involvement in their child's school experience as possible, some parents expressed concern that we were coddling our children by possibly paying too much attention to their emotional needs. One parent wrote, "We are trying to raise young adults who are ready to enter the world in a few years and do it on their own. I feel we should be giving them MORE responsibility and less restrictions. We need to give them wings and learn to fly, so if they crash and burn now we are here to help them. If we are constantly reigning them in, they will be less prepared to function on their own."



## Engaging all Students in Computer Science

Developing a robust computer science curriculum is inherently challenging because the field is evolving extremely quickly and young people often become adept at aspects of the field more quickly than adults. The Wayland Public Schools has responded to the current computer science trends by introducing students to coding in first grade and giving them regular instruction in programming through eighth grade. In high school, they subsequently have opportunities to deepen their coding expertise through elective classes offered in different coding languages and at different levels. Finally, students can take the elective Honors Applied Computer Science (HACS) to focus on applying their coding skills to solving real-world problems. A number of high school parents expressed the hope that the high school would offer more computer science opportunities for students. The high school staff continues to examine approaches that would give advanced computer science opportunities for a small number of students without shouldering the financial burden of a new elective class.



## Co-Curricular and Interscholastic Athletic Programs

Wayland has comprehensive and inclusive athletic and co-curricular programs. Over seventy percent of students played on over seventy interscholastic athletic teams at Wayland High School during the 2016-2017 school year. The students' enthusiasm for the co-curricular programs extends from sixth grade through twelfth grade. On the Superintendent's survey, 93% of both Wayland High School and Wayland Middle School students stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had found "one activity outside of school that [they] enjoy very much." Eighty-three percent of WHS students and eighty-five percent of WMS students agreed or strongly agreed that "the coaching or advising that [they] receive in [their] extracurricular activities helps make the activity more satisfying and enjoyable."

The Athletic Department makes systematic efforts to ensure that boys' and girls' sports receive equal levels of support. The Wayland High School administration regularly reviews each team's budget to ensure that athletic teams receive appropriate funding. Each team is part of a regular rotation, ensuring that playing fields are scheduled and uniforms and equipment is renewed and refurbished on a consistent and equitable timetable.

## Co-Curricular and Interscholastic Athletic Programs (continued)

That said, the school continues to monitor the inclusivity of its athletic program in response to the recommendations of Northeastern's "Wayland High School 2015 Athletics Culture Study Report." The report raised important topics for ongoing discussion regarding the role of winning and of individual skill development in the context of Wayland's interscholastic sports program. In my focus groups, some students questioned whether certain types of student-athletes get too much attention. Clearly, the role of athletic teams in the District merits continued discussion.



Credit: WSPN

## Teacher Professional Development

Teachers have embraced professional development opportunities, particularly when they have a clear sense of urgency, helping them implement what they learn soon after receiving the training. For example, early elementary teachers have responded enthusiastically to the training for an intricate phonics program, Foundations, newly adopted in Wayland. They have made the most of periodic webinars where they receive professional development. Teachers, in addition, have worked with the Elementary Math Coordinator and math coaches to create a math program that has an evolving scope and sequence, and a corresponding set of materials, that they supplement periodically. The program allows needy students to get necessary remediation while offering project-based learning for those that are ahead. The Middle School and High School staff have embraced taking professional development that prepares them to teach new electives in subjects like computer languages and forensics. Students have responded to this enthusiasm by signing up for and expressing excitement about these classes.

Teachers expressed mixed feelings about the professional development that the district has provided. Only fifty-nine percent of the respondents stated that "the professional development that the district offers is "useful in developing my skills". Some teachers also expressed concerns that new initiatives required more district-wide professional development limiting their time to share best practices with their colleagues. On the other hand, some teachers, particularly elementary teachers, requested a more systematic, centralized approach to curriculum implementation. Despite their involvement in the development of Wayland's mathematics scope and sequence, for example, some elementary teachers felt that Wayland should adopt a published mathematics program. (It should be noted that a district-wide curriculum review team has looked closely at available math programs but has not found one that is sufficiently aligned with the state's math standards and has robust hands-on activities.) Teachers want a coherent learning experience for children but also want to be able to take initiative within that structure. Providing professional development to serve both professional needs requires ongoing District attention.

## Opportunities for Growth

### The Study of World Languages

After it became a topic of discussion at the 2015 School Committee summit, the District formed the World Language Task Force, a group of parents, teachers, and administrators. This group's report at the conclusion of its work emphasized the research that shows that before puberty, children are far better at learning new languages. They also saw it as critical that our children become multilingual in order to succeed in the future job market as English loosens its grip as the international language of commerce and innovation. Finally, many Wayland respondents expressed concern that most of the districts around Wayland have elementary language programs while Wayland does not.

In 2016-2017, the Task Force developed a plan to initially address this need by calling for the creation of a Spanish-immersion section in one of the district's elementary schools. The District plans to launch this new immersion classroom in the fall of 2018. In addition, the District will continue to look for new opportunities to integrate world language into the experiences of all of its students. One option that is more challenging logistically is to simply add world language classes to elementary students' schedules. Principals and teachers would have to carve out extra academic time in an already crowded schedule.

### Civic Engagement

The Wayland High School students spoke frequently about the challenges of navigating the present political moment. Nineteen percent, a relatively high level of disagreement on this survey, said that they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that "I feel like I can express myself honestly at school." One student wrote, "I'm lucky. I think this school has too strong of a liberal bias. I'm lucky that I'm a liberal (or at least a left-leaning moderate) myself, so I don't feel ostracized, but I know people who feel extremely uncomfortable expressing their views or beliefs here, because of the way people stigmatize the Conservative party or react towards the label 'conservative.'"

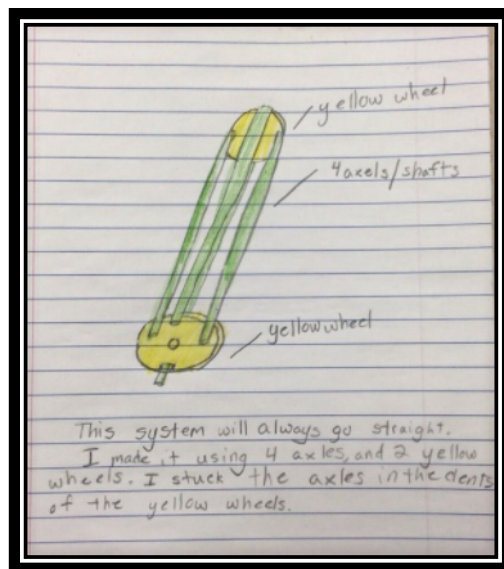
The teachers and administrators at each school have worked to create environments where students learn both how to advocate and to listen to arguments both in favor of change and in favor of preserving traditions. The Model United Nations program at Loker, the community service projects at Happy Hollow, the All-School Meetings at Claypit, the Global Citizens program at Wayland Middle School, the High School Debate Team, and the Wayland Student Press Network (WSPN) are all efforts to give students the chance to assert their beliefs while learning from others in a safe, structured setting.

In my focus group with high school students, the participants expressed a sophisticated understanding of this balancing act. They expressed both a desire to hold onto favorite activities, but an understanding that traditions that don't evolve can be unrepresentative of the needs and wants of the entire student body. Wayland High School's student council and other student-led organizations continue to develop easily accessible platforms for hearing student opinion so that they can initiate helpful change under the guidance of administration. In addition to having student bodies with decision-making authority, WHS also has, and can continue to develop, safe, structured settings where students can verbally disagree more spontaneously. One student wrote in her survey, "We need to be much more open-minded, or open political discourse will not be possible, and people who graduate from this school will be self-absorbed, self-righteous, and ignorant." Perhaps students can participate in larger forums to publicly

debate controversial topics, informing the actions of both student decision-making bodies as well as those of administration.

## The Writing Program

The need to voice opinion, challenge each other, and eventually deepen understanding requires a deep and coherent approach to teaching writing from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In interviews, in the focus groups, and on the surveys, one of our parents' desires was to make our approach to writing more coherent. In addition, several teachers spoke about the fact that the approach to writing is more individualized than systematic. One teacher wrote, "There is a need for a holistic approach to writing instruction." For the past several years, Wayland has employed two elementary writing approaches, Lucy Calkins Writers' Workshop for early elementary and Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) for grades three through five. Wayland also uses a spelling program called Words our Way. The challenge is to build a coherent program that provides consistent strategies, engaging writing prompts, and helpful feedback without routinizing writing instruction in a way that cuts into the joy that students get out of sharing their experiences and opinions with their teachers and classmates.



## Transitions Between School Levels

Parents consistently praised the transition between elementary and middle school. They appreciated the fact that students had chances to make-up poor grades on tests and that the Middle School de-emphasized homework. The majority of teachers, students, and parents all appreciated the Catch Up and Breathe (CUB) weekends that occur approximately monthly at the middle school.

Many parents at the high school, meanwhile, expressed concern about the abruptness of the transition to a more intense academic experience. Parents felt that the amount of homework was very surprising to ninth graders. They also felt that in ninth grade students suddenly had important assignments to which they were not accustomed, such as multi-paragraph, analytical essays.

## The Study of Social Social Studies and History

Students in elementary schools have some common experiences in social studies. All students in third grade, for example, go to Plimoth Plantation. Most students subsequently write an essay comparing the Wampanoag and colonists' daily experience. At the same time, however, Wayland students typically do not cover all of the social studies units in the same depth.

The reason for this lack of consistency is that over the last several years the elementary teachers and administrators have emphasized consistent approaches to reading, math and social-emotional learning. Wayland elementary schools have a thoughtful approach to differentiating instruction in math and reading. Students spend time receiving core instruction together. Then, depending on need, they break into small groups receiving instruction that targets their needs and enhances their strengths. In order to provide both core instruction and individualized, project-based activities, teachers need at least ninety

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minutes a day for literacy instruction and sixty minutes daily for math instruction. In addition, the District has introduced the rigorous new *FOSS* science program to the third through fifth graders in 2017-2018, a program that includes in-depth lab experiences. The District will initiate it in kindergarten through second grade in 2018-2019. Because of these curricular demands, teachers feel they have a limited amount of time to cover significant work in additional disciplines.

That said, the district will likely need to develop a more consistent approach to teaching social studies. Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) may demand that districts implement new social studies standards beginning in the fall of 2018. They may incorporate a social studies MCAS test to ensure local compliance.

Even without a state compliance mechanism, Wayland teachers and staff consistently expressed a desire to have a more coherent approach to social studies. For example, one parent expressed her opinion on the Middle School Parent Survey: "Social studies ... suddenly picks up in middle school where it feels like a frog from the well is suddenly thrown into the ocean. For example, until 5th grade students only study the native American tribes and barely venture into any history outside of [Massachusetts]. In 6th grade however, the medieval/Egyptian/Greek civilizations are thrust upon them, with religious studies. BIG JUMP!"

### **Addressing Student Emotional Health**

Parents expressed a deep appreciation for the work the staff does to support the well-being of the students. For example, one middle school parent wrote: "The middle school is amazing at making some of a child's most awkward years less awkward. The house/homeroom/tag set-up allows for many personal connections between a student and staff, and the growth from 6th grade to 8th grade in students is incredible, and encompasses their transition from a self-centric world to their realization that they are part of the world and have responsibilities to that world as citizens."



At the same time, parents, teachers and students all expressed concern about the stress that students feel in trying to achieve success, particularly at the high school. One parent hoped that we would "[make] true strides towards reducing the anxiety and depression that is increasing in our tweens and teens. That may mean making difficult decisions (starting middle/high schools at 8:30 or later, strictly enforcing social media bans within school hours, etc.), but the district needs to have the social and emotional well-being of its students at the forefront of factors being considered as far as budgeting, programming, initiatives, etc." A student stated the following: "I like the High School, but I have realized the difference in stress from middle school to high school because I feel like I'm trying to take in all the information so I do well on a test. I wish we learned stuff to enjoy it or find an interest in it, not just for a test." Another said, "I take AP BC Calculus, AP English, AP Latin V, AP Biology, and Honors A/P. Thus, the homework load is grueling and unnatural. I could handle it better if not for extracurriculars that are 'necessary' to success in the college process. Presently, I handle it with unhealthy sleep habits."

On the 2016 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS), 37.1% of students expressed that “life was ‘very stressful’ over the past thirty days, a relatively small uptick from 2006, when the percentage of students who felt stressed was 32.1%. These figures are approximately the same, statistically speaking, as those recorded for the MetroWest region in 2016 (35.8%). As staff and parents discussed at a January 2018 meeting about the MWAHS data, changing student experiences related to stress is not as straightforward as addressing substance abuse or other risky behaviors. Learning to cope with stress is a necessary developmental experience for all children, and, therefore, the District’s goal is to provide opportunities for students to safely experience high-stakes situations but ensure that they are accompanied by more predictable, lower-stakes challenges.

Reducing homework as a solution to student stress is a possible approach but received a variable level of attention in the surveys. While thirty-five parents at the middle school thought that we should reduce homework, only five parents at the elementary school expressed concern about homework and two wanted more homework assigned. Meanwhile, at the high school level, only three parents brought up homework as a concern. Seventy-one high school students, on the other hand, expressed that the most important way of improving the high school would be to limit homework.

Note: Here are the results of the survey of High School students on the *amount of homework they did each week*:

Answer Choices	Responses
0-2 hours per week	5.36%
3-5 hours per week	13.89
6-9 hours per week	30.54%
10-15 hours per week	33.70%
More than 15 hours per week	16.51%

### **Fully Supporting the Achievement of Our METCO Students**

Over the summer and this fall, I had several conversations with parents, including Wayland-resident and Boston-resident parents, teachers, and community members passionate about our commitment to METCO. They repeatedly emphasized the immensely positive impact that our Boston students have on the richness of the academic experience of all Wayland Public School students. The community was also unanimous in their belief that Wayland’s METCO program served our Boston-resident students well.

At the same time, respondents expressed concern that the transportation experiences of our Boston-resident students were significant obstacles that interfered with their success. For example, while a significant number of students participated in Wayland High School sports, they participated less often

in more spontaneous after-school events. Boston parents spoke about the complexities of transporting their children for activities that took place after the final 5:15 p.m. late bus left Wayland. Boston students, furthermore, who want to be one-time spectators at a Wayland school event outside of the school day often have to ask other students to spend a couple of hours at their Wayland home. While some students have “METCO families,” homes where they can easily spend the night spontaneously, some do not have this arrangement.

Because of their unique transportation needs, any changes we make in Wayland’s daily school schedules can have a particularly significant impact on Boston-resident students. Boston-resident and Wayland-resident parents, District and METCO staff have worked closely with the superintendent, for example, to address the unique impacts that changes in start and end times might have on our Boston-resident



students. The flexibility and thoughtfulness of the Boston-resident families in finding solutions that serve the needs of their children while benefiting the entire District has consistently impressed me. At the same time, the District needs to keep striving to make Wayland-based activities as accessible as possible for Boston families.

The Wayland Public Schools faces a stubborn achievement gap between our Boston-resident students and our Wayland-resident students. For example, only 5% of Boston-resident students participate in Advanced or Advanced Placement classes versus 45% of Wayland-resident students. In addition, our Boston-resident students do not perform as well on the MCAS as our Wayland-resident students. The gap between the

percentage of Boston-resident students who score “Proficient” or “Advanced” on math and reading MCAS tests, on the other hand, shrinks between third and eighth grade, suggesting that more years in Wayland Public Schools is helping to improve the Boston-resident students’ performance.

The Wayland Public Schools has addressed this achievement gap in a variety of ways for the past several years. It has engaged in cultural proficiency professional development to train its staff to address the needs of students of color more effectively. It has developed engaging after-school programming in math, reading, instrumental music, and swimming to address important gaps. Clearly, our work must continue to close the achievement gap between Boston-resident students and Wayland-resident students.

## **Personalized Learning**

The Wayland Teachers have enthusiastically embraced teaching the engineering and design process, developing three inter-disciplinary STEAM (Science-Technology-Engineering- Arts-Math) projects at the elementary schools. At the middle school they incorporate hands-on problem-solving into every unit of the science curriculum. The Invention Lab, at the high school, furthermore, has attracted a wide variety of students to the Invention Class. Students in this class develop a product that will address a problem in the community. Parents applaud these efforts, frequently praising the interdisciplinary efforts of these problem-solving ventures. The CONNECT program at the high school, in its first year,



has piqued interest among students, parents and staff because of its focus on problem-solving and interdisciplinary teaching.

These initiatives all fall under the larger umbrella of personalized learning, experiences that enable students to integrate their diverse levels of expertise, experiences, and interests into the assignments that they complete. Deepening our approach to personalized learning could address district-wide desires to attend to the needs of students who fall “in the middle,” those students who are neither advanced nor struggling.

One challenge for teachers is that the personalization of learning requires that teachers identify a variety of entry points for engaging and challenging students while ensuring that all students reach common, rigorous standards. This matching of students’ skills with instructional activities requires a complex combination of regular data-gathering followed by in-depth lesson-planning. To support teachers in the deepening of personalized learning approaches, the Wayland Public Schools is beginning its participation in the FUSE program developed by the Highlander Institute. FUSE provides several districts in our area with a structure for collaborating in which a middle and high school teacher will receive 2 years of training to coach the district’s teachers in the use of personalized learning approaches.

In surveys and interviews, parents expressed enthusiasm for teachers to strike out in this new direction in order to prepare our children for a changing world of work. One wrote: “Get the students out into the community experiencing things. Have hands on internships... Sitting and learning does not really work in the long term for any of us. When was the last time you went to a conference and had to sit and listen all day? It is painful.” Another parent wrote, “I think WPS needs a comprehensive long-range vision that takes into account what schools and students need to be in order to be ready for the future. I think there needs to be greater attention to hands-on, experiential learning that provides students with the awareness and ability to make decisions and impact their world in positive ways. Wayland's environmental issues and strengths are underused and under-explored--we should be teaching students about their environment and giving them opportunities to impact that environment.”



### **Using Data to Track Student Progress**

Elementary teachers currently hold data meetings at least three times a year in grades one through five, and are beginning to hold them in kindergarten.. They review common assessments to determine how students are progressing in math and reading. During these meetings, teachers also create groups to remediate certain students while challenging others to move ahead. At the middle school and high school, individual departments often have common assessments. However, at the middle school and high school, they do not typically use common assessments to plan upcoming lessons. Middle school

and high school teachers typically discuss student performance on these assessments when placing students in future classes.

While we search for approaches that use student data effectively to identify and address student needs, a number of teachers and parents expressed concern that Wayland already assesses students too often. Unquestionably, the ideal assessment regiment would be one in which assessments were brief and as connected as possible to the regular work of the curriculum. Furthermore, in order to be useful, these assessments should be readily accessible to teachers, enabling them to address the needs of their students on a weekly, even daily, basis.

At the same time, several members of the community and staff members expressed the importance of using a more systematic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of our programs. One parent encouraged us to “take a look at all the programs that have been added in recent years and evaluate their effectiveness. We rarely study the short-term and long-term successes and failures after implementation. For example, programs like RTI, Math Boost, Lit Boost, summer initiatives, etc., are all very expensive, but have student outcomes dramatically improved as a result? If not, the money could be spent elsewhere, to produce better student outcomes.” The District will continue to work to build a useful and effective assessment process that, as much as possible, does not interfere with the dynamic exchange between students and their teachers.

### **Improving the Functionality and Cleanliness of the K-8 Facilities**

The new Wayland High School was completed in 2011 and has received an extremely positive reception throughout the community. At the same time, in surveys and interviews, staff and parents did not express a hope for new buildings at the elementary or middle school levels because they assumed new facilities were not possible in the current fiscal climate. That said, elementary and middle school parents and teachers strongly expressed a desire to study the functionality and the maintenance of the current facilities, particularly the elementary buildings. While appreciating the hard work of our custodial staff, teachers and parents expressed concern about building cleanliness. They felt that problems in the schools related to heating, and basic repairs were, at times, not addressed promptly. We need to work as a District to create a long-term approach to maintaining the effectiveness of our older buildings.

## Conclusion

In this entry report, I have discussed certain themes that emerged from my study of the Wayland Public Schools. The report has highlighted the strengths of our teachers, building-based administrators, and central office staff. It has also highlighted academic and artistic traditions and our strong connections with the parents and the community. Finally, I have surfaced opportunities to deepen our students' experiences in world languages, civic engagement, writing, transitions between school levels, social studies, social-emotional health, fully supporting the achievement of our METCO students, personalized learning, using data to track student progress and improving the functionality and cleanliness of our K-8 facilities. Now that this report is published, I am very excited to work closely with the entire community between now and June to build two to three shared goals.

Perhaps the greatest strength that this report reveals is that the Wayland community shares the belief that our students should learn how to be assertive but not insensitive, fearless but not rash, hopeful and open but not naive. Our schools can build these strengths through consistent, thoughtful experiences where students have the chance to fail and succeed, learn how to value each other's insights, and, in the process, find their voice.

Walter Isaacson, in his recent book *Leonardo Da Vinci*, described Da Vinci's view of applying curiosity in a tumultuous world, a view that rings true today in Wayland. Da Vinci, Isaacson writes, "relished a world in flux...He looked upon his art and engineering and his treatises, as part of a dynamic process, always receptive to a refinement by an application of a new insight. He updated *St. Jerome in the Wilderness* after thirty years when his anatomy experiments taught him something new about neck muscles. If he had lived another decade he likely would have continued to refine the *Mona Lisa*...Relinquishing a work, declaring it finished, froze its evolution. Leonardo did not like to do that. There was always something more to be learned, another stroke to be gleaned from nature, that can make a picture closer to perfect." We want our children to engage passionately in their "evolution," enabling them to make their best effort, yet not letting them think that that effort is final.

