

Educational Program



Amherst Public Schools

Amherst Public Schools District Mission

The mission of our schools is to provide all students with a high quality education that enables them to be contributing members of a multiethnic, multicultural, pluralistic society. We seek to create an environment that achieves equity for all students and ensures that each student is a successful learner, is fully respected, and learns to respect others.

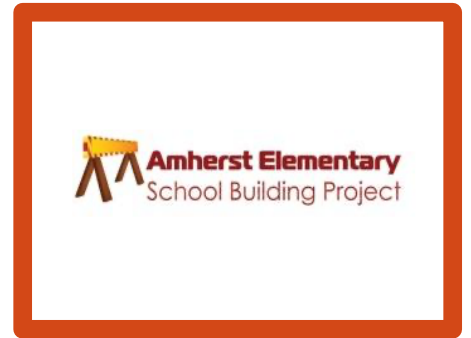


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Introduction

The development of guiding principles for the Fort River School Project is driven by the notion of creating a school environment where students, teachers and families truly want to be and to engage in teaching and learning. Further, the Fort River School is a place where students, teachers, families, and community members work towards a common purpose: equitable and high quality educational and social experiences for all students.

This Educational Program for the Fort River elementary school project builds upon, and updates earlier intensive, creative efforts of a working group convened for the earlier Wildwood project.

Since that document was published Amherst elementary schools have implemented several innovative programs, including a dual language program as well as substantial upgrading and modernizing of the computers and IT systems. Fort River and Wildwood have most recently reconfigured spaces due to COVID. In addition, the Town has enacted a net zero energy bylaw that will require the new school to include advanced, green alternative energy technology and building design.

On October 5, 2021, the Amherst School Committee voted to approve moving the 6th grade to the Amherst Regional Middle School. Moving the 6th graders to the Middle School provides many opportunities for the students as well as providing much needed space at the elementary schools.

MSBA has accepted that the 6th grade would not be part of any option for the current building project. The current building project has two possible configurations. One would consolidate Fort River and Wildwood into a single school with 575 students grades K through 5. This would result in two elementary schools with Crocker Farm serving pre-K through grade five and the 6th grade moving to the Middle School. The other possible configuration would focus on the Fort River school only with 165 students grades K through 5, with continued operation of 3 elementary schools. The reduced enrollment, modified by the MSBA, is based upon the available space at Crocker Farm and Wildwood Schools by moving the 6th grade to ARMS.

Guiding Principles

Excitement and Engagement

- Students are engaged and excited about their learning
- The learning is authentic, meaningful, and relevant
- All students' needs are met through differentiated approaches
- Students are provided with opportunities to grapple and struggle with new ideas and concepts in effort to foster a growth mindset
- Student voices are heard and learning is visible throughout the school
- Students engage in continual self-assessment
- Building Community
- Community-building is a priority within the classroom, across grade levels, within the school, and across the Amherst community
- Students will have a "small school" experience and feel connected and known by peers and adults in the school

Adaptability and Flexibility

- The infrastructure will be flexible and built for the future
- The spaces in the building will support all learners to engage in deep thinking and learning
- The building will be green with an eye toward climate justice
- Outdoor areas and the building will provide opportunities for students to learn about the environment

Collaboration and Sharing Expertise

- The physical building will support teacher collaboration (i.e., collaborative work spaces and accessible storage of shared materials and resources)
- Teachers will have ample opportunities to share best practices
- Students will learn how to collaborate and there will be ample opportunities to practice teaming skills
- Classrooms will be designed to enable flexible, smaller group break out spaces

21st Century Learning Goals

The following list of priority “21st Century Learning Goals” for Amherst elementary school students was developed by the Educational Working Group (EWG) from the Wildwood Project. The EWG represented parents of elementary students, community members and officials, district administrators, and teachers. Five teams of 4-5 participants worked together to create their own set of Learning Goals, after which each team presented to the larger group, with each member subsequently voting on their priority Learning Goals. While this work was completed several years ago, it is consistent with the current vision of the district and the work within the district since that time has reflected these goals. In addition, this work has been validated with the recent Educational Visioning Meetings with staff and community members as part of the Fort River Elementary School project.

Empathy, Citizenship, and Ethics

- Flexibility and community; social and self-awareness

Curiosity, Creativity, and Risk-Taking

- Self-directed learning; imagination

Collaboration

Cultural Awareness and Expression

- Multi-cultural Literacy and Global Awareness

Effective Oral and Written Communication

Grade & School Configuration Policies

Located in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, the Town of Amherst is a diverse, inclusive community offering numerous educational and cultural opportunities. Host to Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the Town enjoys transparent, professional, and high-level government services, quality education, support for open space and agriculture, and respect for its history.

The Amherst Public Schools currently educate over 1,000 students in grades PreK-6. On October 5, 2021 the School Committee voted to move the 6th graders to the Amherst-Pelham Middle School (ARMS) effective Fall, 2023, which will decrease enrollment. All students will move up to the Amherst-Pelham Regional Middle School and Amherst-Pelham Regional High School. More than the vast majority of Massachusetts school districts, our diverse student body reflects state demographic averages.

Enrollment by Race / Ethnicity (2020-21)		
Race	% of District	% of State
Black / African American	10.0	9.3
Asian	11.9	7.2
Hispanic	22.1	22.3
Native American	0.5	0.2
White	48.7	56.7
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.2	0.1
Multi Race, Non-Hispanic	6.7	4.1
English Language Learners	13.2	10.5
Students with Disabilities	22.1	18.7
High Needs	50.3	51.0

Currently, district students are educated in three elementary schools: Fort River, Wildwood, and Crocker Farm which also houses five integrated preschool classrooms for students throughout the town. The infrastructure of the three schools differs significantly. Fort River and Wildwood Schools are mirror images of one another. Built as “open classrooms,” noise issues led to the erection of partial walls, resulting in the current “quad” set-up, with each quad comprising four classrooms sharing a boys’ and a girls’ bathroom. Due to the ventilation issues and COVID, those temporary walls now go from floor to ceiling, which has created acute space needs as both schools lost 12 instructional spaces with this latest change. In addition, cafeterias, art rooms, music rooms, and technology spaces have been converted into classrooms; the resulting instructional models are suboptimal; and there are not enough rooms for pull-out services for students with special needs and/or English Language Learners; among other challenges. For these reasons (among others), the Amherst School Committee voted to move the sixth grade to the ARMS to alleviate overcrowding in these schools.

Additionally, in 2019, the district implemented the Caminantes Spanish/English Dual Language Program at Fort River. The Fort River Dual Language Program celebrates and integrates the cultures of all of our students, families, and staff. The Dual Language Program appreciates, nurtures, and challenges all of our individual students to reach their fullest potential as learners and global citizens. The Dual Language Program promotes equity by developing culturally competent, bilingual and biliterate students prepared for economic and social leadership in our community and world.

The Spanish DLE program follows key elements of a language immersion program structure. The program is a strand within a school. Spanish and English are used for language/literacy and academic content instruction following a 50/50 model of instruction. Literacy in Spanish and English is introduced simultaneously. There is a strict separation of English and Spanish, the partner language of instruction. The school began introducing the program in Kindergarten and will expand the program each year by one grade level with the expectation that all grades will have the DLE by 2024-25 school year.

The enrollment policy for this program differs from the general enrollment within the district, as it prioritizes having students with Spanish Language background attend the program regardless of the catchment area they reside in. The Caminantes DLE Program teaching method includes:

- The program is working towards a 50/50 model of instruction;
- Separate instructional times are allocated for each language
- Instruction in the two languages is equally distributed throughout core academic instruction for literacy, science and social studies;
- Math is taught in Spanish and supported during center work in English;
- Literacy is introduced simultaneously
- Specials are taught in English, though some specials teachers have bilingual language skills;
- Partner teaching separates the language of instruction - one teacher teaches in English in one classroom and the other teaches in the partner language in the other classroom

The program does not require any additional space requirements. It will require two of the five general classrooms per grade level and will accommodate 40 students per grade level. Half of the students will be taught in English in the morning and half will be taught in Spanish. In the afternoon the students will change classrooms to learn the other language.

School Consolidation

As a result of two aging and outdated facilities in Amherst, the ideal new or renovated Fort River Elementary School facility would be built to also accommodate students currently assigned to the Wildwood Elementary School. The goal is to create a small school feel while bringing full grades together. The benefits to the consolidation are follows:

- Remains intimate, is operationally and cost effective
- Provides for staff collaboration and team teaching (PLCs)
- Maximizes staffing ratios

- Allows shared use of specials teachers which would give students exposure to a diverse curriculum
- Provides for support spaces for special education
- Provides full access to the Caminantes program to students in special education programs
- Reduces travel time (and lost instructional time) for staff who are shared between buildings

As part of the MSBA process, the District will study the following school configurations to determine the most educationally appropriate and cost-effective solution for the Fort River Elementary School project:

- Grades K-5 with an enrollment of 165 students solely at the Fort River Elementary School
- Grades K-5 with an enrollment of 575 students for a consolidated Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools.

Class Size Policies

The Amherst School Committee recognizes the relationship between class size, effective teaching, and student achievement and that this relationship varies across grade levels, among subjects and by methods of instruction. Class sizes that rise above acceptable levels affect both educational quality and the School District’s ability to attract and retain the best possible teachers. Therefore, class size will be determined by several variables including grade level, subject area, particular needs of the pupils in the classroom, nature of the learning objectives, availability of classroom space, instructional methods, availability of support staff, and budgetary constraints.

The annual guidelines for Elementary School class sizes will specify the range in class size for each grade. The District’s preferred ranges for Elementary School class sizes are as follows:

Kindergarten and First Grade	17 to 21 students
Second and Third Grades	19 to 23 students
Fourth through Sixth Grades	20 to 24 students

The School Committee recognizes that the annual guidelines for Elementary School class sizes (and actual class sizes) may be different from these preferred ranges; however, the goal for the class size guidelines will be to keep Elementary School class sizes as low as possible within these preferred ranges, particularly in the youngest grades.

In addition, the district has recently implemented a co-teaching special education model at all of the elementary schools. The class size of co-taught classrooms is slightly less than in other classes to best accommodate students with special needs and leave room for students with special needs who may enroll after the beginning of the school year.

The Fort River Elementary School is currently configured in the following manner (as of 2/1/22):

Grade	Room #	# of Students	Total / Grade
Kindergarten	Room K3	17	53
	Room K1	17	
	Room K2	19	
Grade 1	Room D2	19	52
	Room D4	17	
	Room E2	16	
Grade 2	Room E2	18	60
	Room E4	16	
	Room (co-taught) C2	14	
	Room (co-taught) C2	12	
Grade 3	Room F2	20	41
	Room F4	21	
Grade 4	Room G2	20	37
	Room G4	17	
Grade 5	Room Purple Cafeteria	20	62
	Room Old Music Room	20	
	Room Green Cafeteria	22	
Grade 6 (which will not be located at Fort River ES at the completion of the project)	Room H2	22	45
	Room H4	23	
Total			350

The Wildwood Elementary School is currently configured in the following manner:

Grade	Room #	# of Students	Total / Grade
Kindergarten	Room K2	18	36
	Room K3	18	
Grade 1	Room E1-2 Co-Teaching	24	44
	Room D3-4	20	
Grade 2	Room D1-2	16	51
	Room C3-4	16	
	Room C1-2	19	
Grade 3	Room E3-4	17	51
	Room F1-2	16	
	Room F3-4	18	
Grade 4	Room H3-4	20	58
	Room G3-4	18	
	Room G1-2	20	
Grade 5	Room H1-2	18	48
	Room Old ELL Room	16	
	Room Old Art Room	14	
Grade 6 (Which will not be located at Wildwood at the completion of the project)	Room Old Music Room	20	60
	Room K1	19	
	Room Cafeteria One	21	
Total			348

Fort River Elementary School Only: To maintain the student-to-teacher ratio it is strongly recommended that there be two classrooms per grade. In addition, it is important to maintain the same number of classrooms per grade. The breakdown per grade based upon an enrollment of 165 students follows in the chart below.

GOAL Class Size	K	1	2	3	4	5	Total
# Students (Average)	27	27	27	28	28	28	165
Average # students/class	19	19	20	20	20	20	~
# of classrooms	1.42	1.42	1.35	1.40	1.40	1.40	8.56
Round for Total Classrooms / Grade	2	2	2	2	2	2	12

Fort River Elementary School combined with Wildwood Elementary School: To maintain the student-to-teacher ratio it is strongly recommended that there be five classrooms per grade. The breakdown per grade based upon an enrollment of 575 students follows in the chart below.

GOAL Class Size	K	1	2	3	4	5	Total
# Students (Average)	95	96	96	96	96	96	575
Average # students/class	19	19	20	20	20	20	
# of classrooms	5.00	5.05	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.80	29.83
Round for Total Classrooms / Grade	5	5	5	5	5	5	30

School Scheduling Method

The Amherst Public Schools have developed a schedule to design sufficient time for each core content area while maintaining a whole child approach, recognizing the value that social-emotional instruction, specials, and recess have for elementary students. In addition, we provide contractual preparation time for all professional staff members. The current and proposed weekly time allotments are as follows:

<i>Literacy:</i>	<i>550-700 minutes</i>	<i>Mathematics:</i>	<i>300-350 minutes</i>
<i>Science/Tech/Engineering:</i>	<i>90-120 minutes</i>	<i>Social Studies:</i>	<i>90-120 minutes</i>
<i>Social Curriculum:</i>	<i>50-100 minutes</i>	<i>Art:</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>
<i>Music:</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>	<i>Instrumental Music (option for older elementary students):</i>	<i>75 minutes</i>
<i>Physical Education, Health, and Wellness:</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>	<i>Instructional Technology:</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>
<i>Library:</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>	<i>Integrated Arts (grades 5 & 6):</i>	<i>40 minutes</i>

The Amherst School Committee supports the provision of an adequate number of specials teachers in the district. These programs support the commitment the community holds to provide a well-rounded program of studies to elementary students. The specialists have additional hours beyond their specials teaching responsibilities to integrate with classroom teachers and other staff members to provide an integrated approach to teaching and learning. While this is a formal part of the schedule for students in grades 5-6, the integrated arts is occurring across all grade levels.

The instrumental music program is robust. Strings lessons are available in 3rd grade and wind lessons are available starting in 4th grade. Finding space for both the small group lessons as well as the ensembles is a significant challenge. It is not currently possible to schedule enough small group rooms to accommodate the needs of the program, so entryways into teacher work rooms are used for these lessons. More information about the space needs of arts programs can be found below in the Teaching Methodology and Structure section.

Teaching Methodology and Structure

Fort River Elementary and Wildwood Elementary Schools engage in professional learning communities (PLC). The schools are organized in seven teams, kindergarten through grade six. These teams are comprised of general education, special education, literacy, math, and ELL teachers. They conduct the data cycle as a collaborative team to improve learning for all students in the grade level. The weekly 60-minute PLC blocks and 30-minute grade level blocks support their ability to collaborate within the school day.

The teachers implement the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the rigorous curriculum and assessment expectations set forth by the Amherst Public Schools. The curriculum is fully aligned with the current frameworks, ensures a full vertical articulation in all areas, and to fully

integrate SEL competencies within the content areas. The educational program outlined herein contains curriculum and will be incorporated into the updated building.

Below is an overview of the general elementary curriculum and methods used by our talented staff members.

Math

The Amherst Elementary Math program consistently provides opportunities to engage and challenge all students through the use of multiple modalities while supporting a model of growth mindset. To implement the Massachusetts State Frameworks, teachers have access to and use high quality curriculum products as the core curriculum and other resources to supplement that text. The district is in a review process to select a new math curriculum that better aligns with the Frameworks and integrates technology and more traditional teaching techniques. The decision will be made in the spring of 2022. Teachers help students to lead math congresses and to share mathematical ideas and thinking. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility however there will be appropriate spaces to deliver the curriculum.

To set the stage for this work, the district has employed math specialists charged with working with grade level teams throughout the year. In math team meetings, educators discuss state standards and how to engage all students. By starting with the state standard, the team can decide the learning target of the lesson. By assessing student work, the team can then focus on differentiating benchmarks to meet the needs of diverse learners within the student-centered classroom. The team looks at the work offered in the lesson and thinks about the cognitive demand presented in each task. The goal is to provide material that has the types and level of thinking required of students in order to successfully engage with and solve a task. The objective of each lesson is to present students with a variety of experiences in math class where tasks consistently encourage high-level student thinking, synthesis and application. Teachers choose tasks that will engage students in a productive struggle, but yet are attainable. Additionally, these tasks also provide opportunities for student reflection and additional opportunities for learning.

To give every student the opportunity to access in-class activities teachers develop a well-rounded math curriculum. This includes opportunities for numeracy work, core instruction, practice activities, extension activities, small group work, partner work, math projects and the use of spiral reviews. To foster the mathematical practice standards, teachers lead students in computational and conceptual conversations that stress problem solving, the use of multiple representations through mathematical modeling, and sharing of their ideas. Teachers differentiate lessons by addressing the gaps in student learning and offering adjusted activities that provide an enhanced study of the math concepts. For students who have been identified with intervention needs, a math enhancement block is available daily. Students with IEPs have their needs met with a combination of co-teaching and pullout services to support their learning.

Amherst elementary teachers are striving to create a culture of mathematicians who have the wherewithal to think through complex problems, to engage in a cycle of inquiry, and to persevere through a challenge when the answers do not come quickly. As educators engage in a collaborative process with student mathematicians, they strive to nurture lifelong habits of successful math learners. Those habits develop the ability to reason about problems, to offer different perspectives, to construct and justify arguments, as well as to have an internal awareness of when an answer does not make sense. The students as well as educators are committed to these overarching learning targets every day and work towards creating a math environment where there are opportunities for growth, understanding, rigor and shared achievements.

Literacy

Based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the English Language Arts Program serves to help all children develop communication skills in writing and reading to develop a lifelong interest in literacy. Using a balanced, multi-faceted approach to literacy instruction, teachers integrate direct instruction with authentic reading and writing experiences so that students learn how to use literacy strategies and skills and have opportunities to apply what they are learning. Teachers strive to find balance for every child by being flexible and selecting appropriate strategies based on their individual needs. Students receive at least 90 minutes of daily instruction in ELA. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility.

Through a balanced approach that includes instruction using the reading and writing workshop model, explicit phonics instruction, and word study, students develop:

- Phonemic and phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge
- Alphabetic knowledge, blending, sound/symbol correspondence, structural analysis, contextual clues, and high frequency words
- Comprehension strategies in order to evaluate, synthesize, analyze, connect, infer and inquire
- Vocabulary
- Process writing, spelling, and grammar

In addition, students read both orally and silently and are read to from a variety of high quality increasingly complex fiction and nonfiction texts at both independent and instructional levels. Students participate in small group instruction and read a variety of reading materials from trade books, leveled books with controlled vocabulary, and decodable books. Students write daily to support and extend their knowledge of the structure of language and construct meaning. Technology is incorporated into the ELA classroom to support the reading and writing process, including iPads for younger students working on phonemic awareness.

Formal and ongoing informal assessments such as The Benchmark Assessment System, spelling inventories, and phonemic inventories allow teachers and specialists to intervene early with appropriate instruction to students who are not progressing. Grade level data meetings are held twice a year to examine student data and identify students in need of Tier 1 and 2 interventions. Students receive Tier 2 targeted literacy interventions during a 30-minute Enhancement block. Interventionists use Aimsweb assessments to monitor student progress. We use a wide range of Tier 2 interventions that are based on students’ specific learning profiles. Utilizing Title 1 funds, four literacy specialists per school support these interventions both in the classroom and with pull out services. The consolidated school would require 6 literacy specialists. Ideally the literary specialists would share one to two large spaces for collaboration.

In support of literacy, a new building will house a Literacy Professional Center which would serve many purposes. The space would be the location of professional learning for teachers, assistants, and parents. In addition, the Literacy Professional Center will provide an alternative location where teachers may utilize the space for specialized instruction for small groups or 1:1 intervention. The specialized materials used for literacy intervention would also be stored in a centralized location to facilitate access by teachers providing RTI (Response to Intervention) services to students in classrooms and small group spaces. The collection used for literacy instruction would also be housed in the shared literacy professional center space to facilitate sharing the texts and

technology devices across classes and grade levels.

Each floor would include instructional spaces (small group rooms) adjacent to clusters of classrooms for small group lessons. Literacy specialists, math specialists, ELL teachers and special education staff would utilize the small group rooms.

Science

The elementary science curriculum used in the Amherst Public Schools was designed to align with the Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Standards and is undergoing revision and realignment to better correlate with the Revised MA STE Standards. These updated standards are based on the Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize authentic inquiry and hands-on learning, including: asking questions, defining problems, developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data, using mathematics and computational thinking, and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility; however a dedicated STE classroom would be ideal to allow students to engage in more hands-on experiences that are not afforded to them in the general classroom.

Most units of study used in the district are kit-based. These kits are kept in large bins and need to be stored out of the way of the instructional area, in a designated and securable space. Science instruction at all levels requires access to water (as both a scientific “supply” and for the purposes of clean up and health/safety), so convenient access to sinks is essential. Due to the use of liquids in hands-on investigations, activities, and demonstrations, waterproof (non-carpeted), non-slip floor surfaces are important, especially in areas of the room where science activities will take place (e.g., flooring materials, some of which are not adequate for proper science instruction). Many science investigations also require workspaces larger than the traditional-sized student desks found in most classrooms.

Science Technology & Engineering (STE)

The elementary science curriculum used in the Amherst Public Schools was designed to align with the former Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering (MA STE) Framework and is undergoing revision and realignment to better correlate with the updated (2016) MA STE Framework. These updated standards emphasize student sensemaking through exploration of phenomena, hands-on learning, equitable access to the curriculum, and the development of key skills (Science & Engineering Practices) including: asking questions, defining problems, developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data, using mathematics and computational thinking, and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

The curriculum is spiraling; at each grade level students engage with concepts and skills related to Earth and space science, life science, physical science, and technology/engineering. Interdisciplinary connections are woven into many units of study, including through project based learning. Place-based learning and environmental literacy are supported in a number of ways including through the Hitchcock Center for the Environment’s Naturalist-in-Residence program. Field trips to local museums, farms, and other sites provide students with new ways to apply and extend their science knowledge and skills.

School garden sites play an important role in our science and interdisciplinary learning as well. The School Garden Program provides a year-round, garden-based, standards-aligned curriculum for all students in grades K-5. Each school has 15+ raised garden beds which are used in garden-based

lessons with the Garden Program and for other projects as led by classroom teachers. A storage shed adjacent to the gardens holds hoses, shovels, and other tools.

The STE curriculum and delivery methods, already undergoing shifts, will not change because of a new facility. That said, the impact and efficacy of the STE learning experiences we offer could be greatly enhanced by several building features. These include:

1. Access to sinks/water
Science instruction at all levels requires access to water (as both a scientific “supply” and for the purposes of clean up and health/safety), making convenient access to sinks along the perimeter of the classroom essential.
2. Appropriate flooring materials
Due to the use of liquids in activities and demonstrations, waterproof (non-carpeted), non-slip floor surfaces are important, especially in areas of the room where science activities will take place.
3. Ample work space
Effective STE learning spaces have a variety of horizontal and vertical workspaces to support teaching and learning. These allow for flexible arrangement to support individual and small group work, whole-classroom discussions, demonstrations, presentations, and investigations. In STE learning spaces, large, seamless desktops/workspaces are strongly preferred. Whiteboards and bulletin boards support communication and sharing of student work.

A designated STE Classroom and/or flexible makerspace (separate from an STE-optimized general classroom) would provide additional instructional room to support students’ development of engineering/design and other 21st century skills that are applicable across subjects, particularly in project-based learning: e.g., creative thinking, problem solving, prototyping, testing and revising. Spaces like cubbies and countertops are recommended so that student work can be set up for extended periods of time. Low shelving provides students with easy access to the materials they need. An open floor space permits rearrangement of furniture for different purposes.
4. Ample storage space
Many units of study require a substantial volume of supplies which are typically stored in large bins. These need to be stored out of the way of the instructional area. This storage space should be securable to prevent unauthorized access to expensive equipment and items that require adult supervision for safe handling. This applies for any designated STE/makerspace rooms as well.
5. Access to outlets
STE learning requires access to outlets to support Chromebooks, clamp/desk lamps, and other electrical tools, primarily at the upper elementary level. Electrical ceiling drops, especially in any dedicated STE classroom or makerspace, help provide access while minimizing safety hazards.
6. Access to the outdoors
Outdoor learning and environmental literacy are important components of our curriculum. These can be supported through visual and physical access to the outdoors which allows people to observe natural phenomena like weather, migration, and plant growth. Large windows overlooking the grounds and doors that connect classrooms directly with the schoolyard support these aims. Garden beds and other growing spaces like pollinator

gardens require southern exposure and/or full sun. A Net Zero, LEED, or “green” building can incorporate equipment and data displays regarding solar panel production, energy consumption, rainwater harvesting, etc. all of which can be leveraged for teaching and learning. Site considerations such as stormwater detention / retention ponds as well as lessons on native and drought resistant plantings and other natural resources can be incorporated into the curriculum as well. Universal design principles applied to garden sites and other outdoor areas support equitable access to these important spaces.

Outdoor Space: Science and Environment

The elementary science curriculum incorporates two outdoor components. The first of these is outdoor garden beds. There are approximately two garden beds per grade level at each school, and each school has an outdoor shed equipped with hoses, shovels, and other tools for use in the gardens. At present, some teachers use the garden to plant seeds and observe plant growth in connection with related units of study. A science/garden curriculum has been implemented in grades K-3, (with expansion to all elementary grade levels planned over the next few years). The program’s goal is to create hands-on lessons and activities that capitalize on the connections between garden-related content and the state learning standards for each grade level. The second outdoor component involves visual and physical connection to the natural world. The visual connection (allowing for daily observations of the outdoors regardless of weather conditions/season) is made possible by the placement of numerous windows in instructional spaces. The physical connection is facilitated by easy access to the outdoors via conveniently located doors and allows students and teachers the opportunity to engage in scientific thinking and skills practice in an authentic, engaging, and relevant manner.

The environmental aspects of the new school will also be incorporated into the curriculum. The school will be at minimum Net Zero Energy capable. Displays for the solar panels and canopies as well as vision into the mechanical spaces can be utilized as learning tools. Site considerations such as stormwater detention / retention ponds as well as lessons on native and drought resistant plantings and other natural resources can be incorporated into the science curriculum.

Social Studies

Students engage in a history/social sciences curriculum that, wherever possible, integrates with the informational skills components to support the development of analytic thinking and application skills. It is important that there is wall space available for maps and educational posters/displays as well as ample storage capacity for books and other content materials. We also integrate the arts into this content area. The concept of social justice and explicit teaching of the perspectives of disadvantaged groups of people, while taught across content areas, is particularly connected to social studies. Ensuring that history is studied through multiple perspectives with a focus on multicultural content and pedagogy is a critical element of our program. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility.

Social/Emotional Learning

We utilize multiple tools to ensure that students are supported in the social/emotional realm. Second Step is our core curriculum used for teaching social emotional skills. We employ a tiered model of support and core values to promote positive behavior in all contexts of our school. In addition, many classrooms use the Zones of Regulation program and other Sensory Smart tools that might influence how we design learning spaces that can support all learners in this domain.

Caminantes

The Amherst Public Schools implemented the Caminantes dual language program in 2019-2020. The program is taught using a 50/50 model, with students receiving half a day of instruction in both English and Spanish. The program uses bilingual texts to ensure that the full curriculum is being taught to all students. Due to that, some different curriculum items have been purchased in literacy, science, and social studies to ensure that the Massachusetts Frameworks are covered throughout the students' elementary school careers. The program requires two adjacent classrooms for each grade level as students travel back and forth between their Spanish and English classrooms throughout the day. There is not a requirement for additional classrooms as these students are part of the proposed enrollment and will be utilizing general classrooms at the appropriate grade level.

The Integrated Arts

Over the past few years, the Amherst Integrated Arts Initiative has been a critical part of the work of the district. It is our belief that the arts play a central role in the education of our students. In a collaborative process, our specialist team developed a definition and foundational goals for the initiative:

The Amherst Integrated Arts Initiative* is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through interdisciplinary experiences. Students engage in a creative process that connects multiple disciplines and meets evolving objectives through these experiences.

*This includes visual, literary, performing, movement/kinesthetic, and the technical arts

Common Threads in Arts Integration

- Collaborative Work
- Community Building
- Creative Process
- Equity and Empowerment
- Skill Development
- Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Foundational Learning Goals for AIAI:

- Students and teachers regularly engage in exciting collaborative learning experiences
- The initiative offers opportunities for building community and enriching students' lives in and beyond school
- Students and teachers consciously develop their personal creative process through regular practice
- The initiative promotes equity by honoring and celebrating our diverse community to inspire and empower students
- Students will have opportunities to develop and practice skills in discrete disciplines, including the visual, performing, movement/kinesthetic, literary and technology arts
- Students and teachers have opportunities to engage in meaningful interdisciplinary work.

Visual Arts Program

Students in kindergarten through 6th grade receive 40-minute art sessions once per week. Additionally, students in 5th and 6th grades have weekly Arts Immersion classes, a choice-based district-wide initiative to provide students with an immersive and interdisciplinary experience in each of the Specials areas. The curriculum and delivery method from the original program will not change with the “new” facility including the use of a kiln. One art room will support specials classes for an enrollment of 575 students. The school is able to schedule the special for each grade so that each class can utilize the one art room. In addition, having the STEAM classroom will offer flexibility for integration of the curriculums, a critical component of the student experience in the elementary schools in Amherst.

Currently, the art rooms at Wildwood and Fort River are being used as classrooms, so the art teachers have been forced into teaching “art on a cart”, which shift the programming due to the lack of space and access to curricular items that are not mobile (ex: kilns).

The new or renovated art room must be equipped to provide all students with a rigorous, varied, and exciting art education in a variety of high-quality media and with many possibilities for interdisciplinary connection. Ample storage spaces must be provided for flat works on paper or canvas as well as three-dimensional mixed-media sculpture. A clay storage area and well-ventilated kiln and glazing area are required, separate from the areas storing paper or flammable liquids. The room must have ample natural light as well as wall space for a projector, whiteboard, and many bulletin board surfaces for displaying exemplary student work and additional relevant works of art. Sinks of varying height (suited to a variety of age ranges) must be provided - four sinks would be ideal. Cabinets, countertops, drying racks, and storage cubbies must be provided to store the work of hundreds of students as well as all of the supplies to serve the whole school. Any art room must also have ample storage space in its own large storage closet with shelving (metal is safest), sturdy worktables, large storage closets, teacher preparation areas, class meeting spaces with a whiteboard and projector or smartboard, an area for several computers with internet access, a printer, and plenty of natural light. Ideally, the art classroom would also have a door to the outside for outdoor art activities.

Currently, the art teacher experiences limitations in being able to adequately display the many wonderful assignments that students create. While there is some display area in the hallway, the outdated nature of the two small cabinets and multiple bulletin boards do not draw proper attention to the projects. Therefore, ample display areas for both two- and three-dimensional student work is needed. These display spaces should be in hallways, in the lobby, offices, and in other central and community areas throughout the school. These should be lockable, easy to clean, and well-lit.

Another distinct element of the art program is that art specialists collaborate with grade level teachers to integrate curricular standards with creative endeavors. For example, when the 3rd graders study the Wampanoag, the art and grade level teachers present various visual models of these historic dwellings. Then, the art teacher guides students through the process of creating their own wetu. Another grade level studies animal adaptations; the art teacher works with students to create diorama models that include habitat as well as clay animals of their chosen animal. These displays are part of a celebration in which parents are invited.

It is worth noting that the Town of Amherst has a percent for art construction bylaw that might provide for additional options in space and design.

Physical Education Program

Students have a 40 minute physical education session each week. A primary goal of the program is to promote our students to become active people throughout their lives; therefore, students are exposed to many different activities so they can find many that they enjoy. There is a mix of team sports and fitness activities throughout the program. Younger students learn core skills to enable greater participation in team and collaborative games. Older students learn about how to position themselves in space during a game, how to move to the correct spot, and the strategy used to achieve a goal. Team activities are included throughout to support the social aspects of physical education. The physical education teachers also work with small groups of students (often students with special needs) in addition to the weekly classes to support their success in the physical education curriculum and their ability to participate in games at recess and in the community. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility.

Ideal space in a new school would include a traversing wall to allow for more gross motor activities without needing to use belays. The school is able to schedule the P.E. for each grade so that a “full-size” gym (6,000 NFA) is not required. Having a gym of approximately 4,000 NFA will provide sufficient space to schedule PE for 575 students. The District has other full size gyms that are utilized for community programs and therefore it is not a requirement for the combined school.

Music / Performing Arts Programs

Students have a 40-minute classroom music session each week. The program has many components that enrich the lives of students and the school community. At its core, the classes feature large group activities where students learn to work together, play instruments, and engage in song and dance. In addition, a social curriculum is integrated into the program. Cultural diversity is featured through the music that is chosen. An aim is to ensure that students become culturally literate in the musical traditions from around the world. The curriculum and delivery method will not change with the “new” facility.

The mechanics of music, such as music theory and the ability to read and play notes and rhythms, is another core feature of the program. The program is inclusive for all students, including those with intensive special needs.

Current challenges include a music room with poor acoustic spaces at Wildwood. In addition, the music program involves many movement activities, so the size of the space is particularly important. The music program also integrates into classroom activities throughout the year.

Amherst also has a robust instrumental music program. Students have an opportunity to learn string instruments in 3rd grade and wind instruments starting in 4th grade. There are small group lessons (approximately 6 students at a time) and large ensembles that meet weekly to support student development and provide an experience in musical performance. Finding sufficient small group rooms for lessons is a particular challenge.

The music programs contribute to the community in the school. At assemblies, graduations, and other events, aspects of the programs are integral to bring the community together. Parents/guardians typically enjoy seeing the performances that their students participate in throughout the school year. A large space for performances, such as a cafetorium, is a particular need.

Looking forward to a combined school, one music room and multiple ensemble spaces will support the performing arts program for the agreed upon enrollment. In addition, the school will take advantage of the stage in the cafetorium when lunch is not being provided.

Library / Media Center

The Library is a “focal” point of the school and will continue to be in the new school. The media specialist currently works (.5). The library is open for the full academic day for classes and individual students. Our elementary school libraries are staffed with a full-time licensed librarian as well as a library paraeducator who assists students throughout the day.

The library is equipped with an Elmo, and an interactive white board for instruction. A small bank of computers is available for use. The library utilizes technology for checking in/out materials and managing the broad catalog of books.

In the new facility, the Library should serve as a hub of multimedia, multi-mode learning using a variety of resources and tools. The space should be large enough and flexible in furnishings such that it can accommodate multiple groups of students at the same time. Shelving should be low, allowing children to access materials independently while staff to have visibility across the space. Children need a space to listen to stories and receive instruction in research, media, and the love of reading. The teachers will follow the recommended standards for Pre-K-5 Information and Digital Literacy Skills as outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Students also need a space to complete research tasks and projects using both texts and technology, accommodating both technology that remains in the library and laptop computers brought into the library by students (with places to charge them while they work). Within the library there should be space for teacher and parent meetings as well as small group project work. The Library Media Specialist requires a workspace for preparing materials as well as for their circulation. Because the Library will also house the loaner laptop computers for when students’ assigned laptops are being repaired, space will be needed to store and distribute loaner laptops. Ideally the space will be configured to allow students to be part of that technology support process.

Amherst Public Schools provides the elementary schools with a district-wide Assistive Technology Specialist and district-wide Technology Support for technical needs. A work room for these technology specialists could be incorporated into the work room in the Library.

Technology Infrastructure, Instruction Policies & Program Requirements

Labs, Classrooms, Library (Media Center, etc.)

Wildwood and Fort River Schools currently have a robust, though multi-generational, technology infrastructure. The district has long recognized the impact technology can have on education and has provided what resources it can to support that vision. Technology currently at Wildwood and Fort River Schools is summarized as follows:

Infrastructure

All classrooms are currently wired with Cat 5 ethernet. Unfortunately, the bulk of the wiring was installed before 1998. The majority of classrooms have only a single cluster of 6 drops. This wiring is beginning to show its age, with an increasing number of failures, either due to wiring issues, or failing or damaged jacks. The Ortronics wall plates and jacks used are proprietary and don’t use the keystone standard. This limits options when repairing failed jacks. It is often necessary to replace the entire faceplate and all 6 jacks with standard replacements. The single location also limits classroom layout. When multiple locations are desired, either additional drops need to be installed, or existing runs are pulled back and relocated. All drops were wired back to the “book room” closet, the MDF, which contains a rack, patch panels, a UPS and switches.

During the summer of 2012, when implementing a district-wide, standardized IP phone system,

the Information Systems department, with the assistance of the maintenance department, created two additional wiring closets, or IDF. A wall mounted cabinet was installed containing a UPS, patch panel and switch. Intercom handsets were replaced with IP telephones, which required installation of a Cat 5e network drop. At that time, two additional Cat 5e drops were added below the phone location to provide additional flexibility.

All the current switches are capable of providing some 802.11af or 802.11at power over Ethernet. Many locations currently prove extremely challenging to add or replace network cabling due to building design.

Prior to the summer of 2012, the wireless infrastructure for the schools was inconsistent and provided incomplete, spotty coverage. Wireless access points were consumer grade devices which required individual management. In 2012, the Information Systems Department implemented a system-wide enterprise grade wireless infrastructure. The technology at that time was 802.11n and supported both 2.4 and 5 GHz radios. Access points were placed to provide almost complete coverage to the building. During the summer of 2015, some of the 802.11n access points were replaced with 3x3 802.11ac access points to support newer technology, higher speeds and greater density. In summer 2021 newer access points supporting WiFi 6, 2.5Gbps connections to the switch and 4x4 radios were introduced.

The network operating system is Windows-based utilizing Active Directory. Most of the servers reside in the nearby Middle School, with additional servers at both the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School and Pelham Elementary. Users can login to any computer at any building in the district. There are currently 12 strands of multimode cable and 6 strands of single mode. The single mode cable is currently being used to provide a gigabit connection between locations.

All spaces have VoIP phones, with each phone having a unique number. These phones support both internal and external communication. All phones and locations are registered with E991. All phones utilize a single SIP trunk located in the Amherst-Pelham Regional Middle School. There are 2-3 POTS lines at each building in case connectivity to the Middle School is lost. Each building has a local phone server for redundancy.

Classroom Instructional Technology

Almost all grade-level classrooms offer the following instructional technology:

- Digital projector, Flat Panel or Interactive Flat Panel
- Document camera
- At the teacher's request, a Mimio Teach Interactive solution is provided
- A Chromebook cart with enough devices for each student

Additionally, teachers were given the option of replacing a desktop computer with a laptop for their use. District-wide, more than 70% of the teachers have chosen this option.

Networked laser printers are placed strategically in the quads and shared among classrooms. There are also larger capacity network laser printers in the library. There is a networked color laser printer in the computer lab. The district employs two simple devices that allow any printer to support Airprint to support iOS Devices. Google Cloud print was discontinued but a Google extension is being used to support printing to HP printers.

Mobile Technology

Chromebook carts were installed during the summer of 2015 in every 4th-6th grade classroom. Chromebook carts were added to 3rd grade classrooms in 2018. During the 2020/2021 school years Chromebook carts were installed in 1st and 2nd grade classrooms. There are enough Chromebooks in each classroom so that each student has access to their own device; essentially a 1:1 model without take home rights. PreK classrooms have a number of iPads assigned. iPad carts were installed in each Kindergarten classroom with 1:1 iPads. Additionally, many special education staff have iPads assigned for use with students. iPads, Chromebooks and Touchscreen Laptops and Chromebooks are utilized as appropriate Assistive Technology as needed. EL currently employs a mix of iPads and Chromebooks.

All students PreK to 12 and all staff have Google Apps for Education and Office 365 accounts. There are a variety of cloud-based apps utilized by both staff and students.

Library

The library contains a bank of modern computers, 1 used for check out, the remainder for student and staff use. There is a shared network laser printer in the library. A SmartBoard interactive whiteboard and projector are available and utilized in one corner of the library. The layout of the library severely limits its utility. It is open on three sides with multiple means of ingress and egress. The limited wall space means limited available electrical outlets and network drops. No walls means all traffic in the main hallways bordering the long sides of the library is distracting and disruptive to instruction. Students access the library for weekly 40 minute “specials” classes as well throughout the day to select and return books and to work on integrated projects with classroom teachers. The librarians also work with the technology teachers and classroom teachers on integrated projects as part of the arts integration initiative.

Technology: Instructional Model

The majority of technology education happens at the elementary level for students. However, due to the inclusion of tech instruction in the specials rotation, tech instruction time is limited and integration and collaboration is limited. Technology teachers maximize the available time and bring a variety of technology instruction to students including, but not limited to keyboarding, network and internet safety, word processing, spreadsheets and presentations, programming and robotics.

Technology teachers typically see classes once a week. Since this occurs during teacher prep time, tech teachers have an inconsistent ability for collaboration with classroom teachers to fully integrate technology. Despite this, they work with the teachers and students to identify current classroom topics and tailor the activities accordingly. The tech teachers do integrate with library, art, music and some PE as much as possible, and a dedicated space within the media center would assist in this collaboration.

Goals for the future include classroom teachers providing grade level curriculum maps and collaboration time.

In the “new” facility all classrooms will have some type of presentation technology (projector and white board, flat panel or interactive flat panel) and document cameras. In addition, sound reinforcement technology will be in every classroom, with assisted listening devices with the ability to connect to student hearing devices.

There is an Acceptable Use Policy for students and staff in the district. Parents are asked to review the Acceptable Use Policy with their children, sign and return the district form to the main office.

There is a simplified Acceptable Use Guidelines which summarizes the Acceptable use policy for students. All students receive instruction in the Acceptable Use Policy during the first two months of the school year.

Teacher Planning and Room Assignment Policies

The following information describes both the current organization of room assignments as well as the ideal configuration in a new or renovated space.

Classroom neighborhoods, containing multiple spaces with acoustic privacy but in close proximity, would create the community feeling that is essential for students and teachers. It would promote the collaboration that is central to our district's core beliefs on how to improve outcomes for students. Having small group rooms in the neighborhood also would promote our sense of inclusion and would allow for flexible grouping consistent with our co-teaching model that is being implemented. The classroom spaces in each neighborhood would offer flexibility for project-based learning that is also at the core of our instructional vision for the district. Flexible furniture would also attend to the variability of student needs in our student population.

In a new facility, there should be enough special education spaces which would be large enough for teacher planning, testing, consultation and small group instruction. The learning centers should be centrally located on each floor for easy access. A school for 575 students will require ten learning center educators to meet the needs of the students within dedicated learning centers. Two staff will support each learning center, requiring five learning centers.

In terms of the larger spaces, a cafeteria would support many aspects of the school community. This type of multi-use space does not exist at Fort River or Wildwood, which prevents dramatic performances or all-school assemblies from being visually accessible to all students or parents/guardians. In addition, it is currently not possible to "block off" parts of our elementary school buildings for community use. Ideally, core spaces such as the gym and cafeteria could be utilized after hours without the core learning spaces being accessible.

The building would be designed with multiple learning spaces that are not relegated solely to the classrooms. Having clearly delineated interactive spaces in hallways where small groups of students can work with visual access from the classroom is a key component of ensuring that spaces throughout the entire school can be utilized as learning environments. "Chalkboard" and display walls will allow for students to feel ownership of the school while also providing additional small group teaching and working spaces.

Pre-Kindergarten Program

The Amherst Public Schools Preschool Program is an integrated preschool program, which means that both typically developing children and children with special needs are enrolled in the program, learning side by side. Our preschool classrooms are a mixed age group, three to five year olds, who were not age eligible for kindergarten. Children must be three years of age on or before September 1st of that school year.

The mission of the Early Childhood Program is to offer children the opportunity to play and learn in a fun and stimulating environment with same age peers, where children learn from one another. In preschool children learn developmental skills in the areas of: cognitive, social/emotional, communication, fine and large muscle skills. An integrated preschool setting enables all children to participate to their fullest capacities in the mainstream of education. Special education support services – speech/language, occupational therapy, and physical therapy are provided for children

who require these services both in and out of the preschool classroom.

The preschool curriculum is designed to further the overall development of each child. Teachers design activities and curriculum based on the children's interests and is guided by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Preschool Program Standards. Learning takes place for children through a wide variety of play opportunities and interactions with both age level peers and adults. Children enjoy sand and water play, block building, dramatic play, art projects, reading books together, singing and movement games, as well as working on puzzles, turn taking games and much more. Children play outside every day (weather permitting) offering ride-on-toys, climbing structures, games, and building with large outdoor blocks. Our classes are language rich environments. Children learn to be part of a larger group in a small nurturing early educational environment. Field trips are part of the preschool curriculum and we take advantage of the community at large to support the classroom curricular themes.

Parents/guardians are a vital part of their child's development and education. We therefore encourage parent/guardian participation directly or indirectly in the classroom. Our program offers:

- Highly qualified and experienced staff
- A beautiful facility, located in a separate wing of Crocker Farm Elementary
- A new state of the art playground, to be built Summer of 2016
- Affordable sliding fee scale tuition rates
- A celebration of diversity
- Snack daily
- School lunch for purchase as well as Free/Reduced Lunch

Special Education Programs

Our student body is highly diverse in all aspects related to identity and demonstrates varied interests, strengths, and challenges. Our firm belief is that supporting this group of students in academic and social-emotional areas is our ethical responsibility and is beneficial to all students. During the prior Wildwood study project, we partnered with the Special Education Parent Advisory Council to run parent events, to receive feedback on our programming, and to assist our district on interview teams and with the hiring process. In addition, two members of the executive board of our SEPAC were on the Educational Working Group with David Stephen during those discussions.

We host robust in-district programs for students with more significant disabilities because we believe that retaining these students in district with their community peers is beneficial not only to the students with special needs, but to all students in the district. At the current time, only four students are being serviced in an out-of-district placement.

The in-district programs are currently located at the Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools and will continue to be housed in the "new" facility with the exception of the Pre-Kindergarten program which will remain at Crocker Farm Elementary School.

Academic Individualized Mainstream Support (AIMS) Program – Specialized programming for students who have a high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder or other neurological conditions with pragmatic language, executive functioning, socialization and sensory regulation difficulties. This program offers individualized, comprehensive, and intensive intervention to address these

areas. These students are integrated into the general academic environment as much as possible throughout the day; the degree of integration varies based on age and profile. The AIMS program requires a dedicated space to accommodate this program but it is not a self-contained program. Currently there are 8 students in this program which is located at Fort River Elementary School.

Intensive Learning Center Program (ILC) – Specialized program for students who present with highly complicated learning profiles and educational needs that require a significant degree of program coordination and service. These students may have one or more disabilities in any of the following areas: Autism, Communication Impairment, Developmental Delay, Health Impairment, Intellectual Impairment, Neurological Impairment, Physical Impairment, Sensory Impairment, and / or Specific Learning Disabilities. This program provides support and services to students with significant needs within the least restrictive setting while focusing on the individual needs of the students. These students spend the majority of their time in these classrooms. The ILC program requires two large dedicated spaces, ideally each with a bathroom, to accommodate this program. In addition, a motor room to support these students is very important to the program. Currently there are 24 students in this program which is located at Wildwood Elementary School. With a consolidated school, this program will be incorporated into the new facility which will provide the adequate spaces and adjacencies.

Building Blocks Therapeutic Program – Specialized programming for students whose primary needs are social, emotional, and/or behavioral. This program is designed for students whose needs require a smaller, structured therapeutic setting for all or part of the day. A high staff to student ratio is maintained with individualized programming to meet the needs. Services and support are provided on an individual basis and are designed to assist students in developing effective coping mechanisms and problem-solving strategies towards becoming more fully integrated with their typical peers when appropriate. Currently there are 11 students in this program located at the Fort River School. This program will remain at this school.

In addition to our specialized programs, we offer a wide range of services for our students with special needs who are not in district programs. A number of evidence-based instructional strategies have been implemented, such as co-teaching, to improve outcomes for students with special needs.

Co-teaching is a service delivery system in which two or more teachers share instructional responsibility for a single group of students, primarily in a single classroom or workspace, for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, shared resources and joint accountability (although each individual's level of participation may vary). Research conducted over the last 30 years shows that students with disabilities who are educated in general education classrooms are more likely than their peers who are educated in separate classrooms to:

- Acquire reading and math skills,
- Graduate from high school,
- Go on to post-secondary education,
- Have better communication skills,
- Obtain meaningful social relationships, and
- Be welcomed and contributing members of their communities.

Instructional benefits of co-teaching include:

- Strategies integrated into classroom routines
- Skills generalized to authentic tasks
- Immediate application of strategies
- Opportunity for daily practice
- Strategies used across the curriculum
- Problem-solving built into lessons
- Improved instruction for all students
- Instructional fragmentation is minimized
- Co-teacher/special service educator understands the expectation for academics and behavior
- Co-teaching provides support and staff development

Historically, there has been a moderate amount of co-teaching taking place within our schools. When this has occurred, co-teaching has most often best described the staffing pattern rather than the instructional model. Professional development for faculty and staff is essential so that co-teaching pairs learn the differing models of instruction and the necessary skills. We have implemented co-teaching in all of our schools, at all levels, for the past several years. While the research clearly demonstrates the efficacy of this instructional strategy, it is important that we continue to gather feedback from the students learning in this environment to assess their experience.

The core related service providers—Speech/Language, Occupational and Physical Therapists, along with Behavior Specialist/BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)— provide required and essential services to students identified with 504 Plans and Individual Educational Plans that include both consultation and direct service in general education and pull-out educational settings. In addition, these professionals, as well as the Vision Specialist, the Teachers of the Hard of Hearing, Autism Specialists and the Assistive Technology Specialist provide screening, evaluation, consultation and collaboration with various teams of professionals serving students. The Vision Specialist, Hard of Hearing Specialist and Assistive Technology Specialists are utilized throughout the district and as required. A small, shared space for these specialists would be ideal. In many cases, the professional therapist works alongside a para-educator with an individual or small group of students while some students may work with the therapist alone. On a regular, but less frequent basis, the professional therapists provide co-treatment to address a combination of skills in a small group experiential or functional learning scenario, such as the Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist with game skills or the Speech Language Pathology and Occupational Therapist with a unit study-based activity. The therapists consult directly with classroom or special education teachers to make connections to the general education curriculum when possible. In addition to service, teams of related service providers, such as the Occupational Therapists or OT/ST, provide training to the school faculty in utilizing specialized techniques, like S'cool Moves or Zones of Regulation, which benefit the student body as a whole. Related service providers are integrated into professional practice teams at Fort River and the other elementary schools. Several providers also supervise and support the professional development of graduate students during internship placement at Fort River. Specific Speech Language, Occupation, and Physical Therapy staff are

dedicated to the district-wide Intensive Learning Needs program. The core related service providers are an integral part of the Fort River Resource Team. This larger group of providers, teachers of special education, guidance counselors and school psychologists review and develop practices and programs for the benefit of the students they serve through regular meetings and sub-committee assignments.

In support of the special education services both Wildwood and Fort River Schools currently have three Learning Centers each. The students with a moderate level of special needs who require this service account for over 20% of the total student body. Sufficient Learning Centers to accommodate 9 staff will be required to accommodate the entire student population requiring these services in a combined school.

One Speech & Language Pathologist (SLP) is currently assigned to the ILC program and one SLP works in each of the Wildwood and Fort River Schools. Looking ahead to a new consolidated school, there will be a need for two dedicated spaces for each of the SLPs.

One Evaluation Team Leader (ETL) works in each of the Wildwood and Fort River Schools. The Evaluation Team Leader (ETL) leads special education team meetings, supervises special education staff and organizes all mandated documentation associated with special education services. Looking ahead to a new consolidated school, there will be a need for two (2) ETLs. Each ETL will require conference space for Team Meetings of staff and parents in a confidential location near the SPED Leadership Team. In addition, they will each require dedicated office spaces. The ETL also serves as the Assistant Principal at each of the schools and will continue in this role in the consolidated school.

One Psychologist works at each of the Wildwood and Fort River Schools. Two school psychologists at the combined School would require private offices for testing and meeting with families and should be adjacent to the administration and team meeting conference space. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, related service providers require individual spaces in the new school.

Adjustment Counselors are allocated based on current student enrollment. There is one Adjustment Counselor located at each of the Wildwood and Fort River Schools. The consolidated school would require two Adjustment Counselors to support the enrollment. Licensed School Adjustment Counselors provide a continuum of services ranging from case management, small-group counseling, and individualized therapy. They will require individual offices. In addition, due to the confidential and sensitive nature of these services, a private setting such as a conference room, able to house individual and small-group services is needed.

Each Amherst elementary school also employs licensed school counselors who support the social-emotional development of all students. They also play a central role in 504 meetings and supports.

The last scheduled review was completed March 7, 2019. The District was found to be in compliance with all criteria reviewed and no corrective action was required.

There are no other collaborative spaces or programs that are currently housed in either Fort River Elementary or Wildwood Elementary Schools.

There are no Special Education Day School Programs at either Fort River Elementary or Wildwood Elementary Schools.

ELL Program

The Amherst Public Schools' student population is increasingly multilingual, with 50 languages represented among the 27% of students who speak a language other than English at home. Of these multilingual students, there are approximately 150 English language learners. The largest language groups are Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and Korean.

English learners are served in one of two programs: Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) or Dual Language (DL). Students in both programs are served by highly qualified ESL teachers who are well-versed in effective strategies for teaching English as a Second Language, as well as classroom teachers with SEI Endorsement who provide Sheltered Content Instruction. EL students in the Dual Language program learn in both English and Spanish, which is proven to be the most effective model for elementary bilingual students. Teachers incorporate culturally responsive instruction throughout the curriculum that draws on students' strengths and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. There are currently 9.7 ELL teachers and 3 paraprofessionals. Additionally, within the SEI program, interpreters are employed to provide native language clarification to beginning English Learners who benefit from this support to fully access the classroom curriculum. ELL teachers provide instruction both in the mainstream grade-level classroom (push-in/inclusion) and in the ELL classroom (pull-out). The type of instruction is determined by a student's English proficiency and the program model.

ELL small group spaces should be located adjacent to or within grade level classroom neighborhoods to promote flexible grouping and reduced instructional time lost to travel. They also need acoustic privacy as students learning a new language have more challenges with understanding content with auditory distractions. As technology to support ELL students is rapidly developing, ensuring that ELL spaces are fully wired is an instructional necessity.

A number of demographic changes in our ELL population have been observed in the last 10 years. These changes include an increase in the number of newcomers, as well as a growing number of SLIFE students (students with limited or interrupted formal education). Expanding international programs at the University of Massachusetts account for some of this growth in the population of beginners, while various global factors influence the educational background of other groups of immigrant students. We also see an increase in multilingual students attending our preschool program. In order to most effectively welcome and serve all of these students, the new facility will need at least three half size classrooms as well as small group teaching spaces to accommodate the staff and student needs.

Transportation Policies

The Town of Amherst, in conjunction with the Amherst Public Schools, provides transportation. In addition to the state requirements for the transportation of students, as outlined in Chapter 71, Section 68 of the laws of the Commonwealth, Amherst students who reside one and one half miles or more from the school they are entitled to attend shall be provided daily transportation to and from school. Exceptions to this mileage limit may be made by the Superintendent whenever the route to school is determined to be a dangerous way. The School District provides transportation to the special education and special education preschool students.

The buses service the local elementary schools. Last year, the Amherst School Committee voted on a time change, so school will now start and end about 25 minutes earlier than in the past (8:10am-2:40pm). The faculty/staff provide supervision to students during arrival and dismissal

times. Past practice has been to limit rider time to less than 35 minutes per route.

Loading of students occurs with a release of older students first and younger students last.

All students are introduced to bus conduct and proper behavior on, in and around the bus at bus stops, arrivals and departures.

Bus evacuations are conducted by all schools in accordance with the law.

Lunch Programs

The primary goal of the Amherst School Nutrition Program is to serve delicious and healthy meals to as many children as possible. This goal has become increasingly important as the percentage of income-eligible families in Amherst has risen substantially over the past several years. All meals will be free for the current school year in the district and will be evaluated annually. The Amherst Public Schools brought the school nutrition program in-house several years ago, and that transition was very successful in terms of participation in the school lunch program.

The Amherst Food Service program participates in the National School Lunch and Breakfast program. Lunch runs from 11:25 A.M. - 12:45 P.M. and serves students across three waves of eating times. Breakfast programming is undergoing review but occurs before the instructional day begins. The intent is to continue to have three seatings for lunch in the consolidated, new school.

There are two serving lines that lead to a single register. The serving line space is not very flexible and has limited the opportunities to provide promotional activities like guest chefs and the inclusion of a salad bar. The natural light in the cafeteria is limited as well, primarily because of two partitions that divide the cafeteria into three grade specific eating areas. In the new cafeteria the serving lines will each have a register, so the serving lines move quicker and allow students more time to eat.

Functional & Spatial Relationships and Key Programmatic Adjacencies

How the learning areas work together with our educational priorities:

The current Fort River School was opened in 1973, modeled after Wildwood with an open-classroom educational approach. While at one time there were over 600 students served, currently about 340 students come to school each day; the school is expected to gain enrollment for the next four years due to the yearly increases in the Caminantes program. Amherst and the surrounding towns are experiencing a downward trend in enrollment. Currently, Fort River houses two specialized district-wide special education programs and an increased ELL population.

The guiding principles of excitement and engagement, building community, adaptability and flexibility, collaboration and sharing expertise with a foundation of sustainability make this school “A Place Where You Want to Be.” Creating a sustainable building coincides with the community’s sense of social equity and climate justice and is consistent with the Town’s Net-Zero bylaw.

- I. Relationships between classrooms and programs
 - a. The school needs student-centered learning spaces that allow for flexibility in use to address the needs of diverse learners and adapt to changes in instructional programs
 - b. Connections between clustered classrooms should be fostered in order to support cohorts of teacher and students in building a sense of community and ownership

- c. The school accommodates a variety of inclusion, pull-out and reverse inclusion services for students of varying learning needs. The school would need classroom, grade level or grade cluster neighborhoods that allow for sharing of break-out spaces and “maker spaces”
 - d. The school needs spaces that promote student access to the curriculum following Universal Design for Learning. This includes break-out spaces, maker spaces, and science lab for upper-grade classrooms
- II. Spaces inside and outside of classrooms
- a. The playgrounds are well-used both during school and as a community resource.
 - b. The surrounding trails and curated spaces provide a starting point for indoor/outdoor connections.
 - c. Outdoor education
 - d. Materials that are weather resistant and will not overheat in sun, and useable all year for outdoor learning
 - e. Shady areas for instruction
- III. Specialized instruction/Inclusion
- a. The school houses successful specialized programs that provides effective and safe learning environments for students with wide-ranging interests and abilities, the physical design of which is integral to the success of the program
 - b. A new consolidated school would need areas that support regulation through the use of fitness or chill-zones.
- IV. After school/Community Use
- a. The Monday thru Friday after-school programs are in need of space to engage in sports, play, eating, homework, reading instruction, and tutorials
 - b. It is important for the community-at-large to have access for family resources, parent-guardian organizations and other groups such as resource center/meeting room
 - c. There needs to be a safe, secure separate from classrooms entrance to such spaces
 - d. The town’s recreation programs would benefit from a high-functioning space for its programming after the school day is done
- V. Shared, flexible spaces
- a. A priority design element is to provide gathering spaces for classrooms, grade levels and the whole school
 - b. The community has identified the Arts and STEAM along with PE, Music and Library as integral to elementary education. These each require dedicated classrooms, storage, and workspaces
 - c. A critical element of the new or renovated school is the “small school experience and building community” which are supported through a safe and inviting entry space in which families of diverse backgrounds and community members with diverse interests feel welcomed

- d. Flexible and shared spaces will be essential for the future to allow changes in educational programs as needed.

Security & Visual Access Requirements

The Fort River School, as all schools in Amherst MA, requires a safe environment for the Staff, Students and Public.

- A facility that is locked at all times. An access control system for staff members that allow their staff identification badge to grant access to the building
- A receptionist monitoring main access point(s)
- Visual Security of the main entrance utilizing a video monitoring system that will be monitored at the school secretary's desk.
- Visitors to the building should be granted access via door release after communicating with the secretary via video and audio intercom
- Video surveillance and recording of all areas on the interior and exterior of the building
- Safe, well-lit parking for staff
- Safe, well-lit parking for visitors in close proximity to the building
- Safe vehicular student drop-off and pick-up areas (without crossing traffic)
- Safe pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists coming from varied directions to the school
- Safe bus access systems that do not interfere with drop-off and pick-up traffic
- Safe recess grounds and play fields that can be properly supervised by staff and protected from vehicle traffic
- Safe access for kitchen, facility and shipping / receiving separate from school traffic to the main entrance
- Safe and appropriate access to the perimeter of the building and play fields
- High ratio of staff to students while on outside activities
- All staff trained in a district safety procedures and protocols

Day in the life of Student

SAMPLE DAILY STUDENT SCHEDULE	
Activity or Subject	Program Details and Educational Benefit
8:10 Arrive	100% of students can receive free breakfast. Benefit is most of our students are food deprived and may only have 1 meal at home. This is essential for learning to occur. It also cuts down on trips to the nurse's office.
8:30-9:10 Specials	Students go to a Special such as PE, art, technology, library, or music.
9:10-10:10 Math	60 Minute Math Block. This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
10:15-11:45 Reading	90 minutes of Literacy Instruction This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
11:45-12:15 Lunch	30 Minutes of Lunch
12:15-12:45 Recess	Students play indoor games or go outside for recess. This provides down time for students and a time to play outside at the safety of the school.
12:45-1:15 Writing	Students have Writing Instruction This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
1:15-2:00 Academic Intervention and Enrichment Block	Additional support in Math and ELA to master the MA Frameworks; also, lessons in social-emotional learning are integrated into this time
2:00-2:40 Science and Social Studies	Science and Social Studies This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
2:50 Prepare to leave 2:55 Dismissal	Students are dismissed at 2:55

Week in the life of Student

SAMPLE WEEKLY STUDENT SCHEDULE	
Weekly Activity or Subject	Program Details and Educational Benefit
Specials	5x per week for 40 minutes per day, students go to a Special. The benefit is a well-rounded curriculum that addresses the Mass Frameworks in areas such as PE, Technology, art, music, and library.
Math	5x per week, 60 Minute Math Block / 30 Minutes of Intervention This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
Literacy	5x per week for 120 minutes of Literacy Instruction per day. This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.
Recess	Students have recess 5x per week for 30 minutes daily. This provides down time for students and a time to play.
Science and Social Studies	Science and Social Studies 2.5 hours per week for each subject. This allows students to master the Mass Frameworks.

Acknowledgments

Educational Visioning

This revised draft of an Educational Program for the Fort River Elementary School project builds on and updates earlier intensive, creative efforts of a working group convened for the earlier Wildwood project.

Since that document was drafted the schools have implanted several innovative programs, including a dual language program and substantial upgrading, modernizing of the computers and IT systems, as well as reconfiguration of space due to COVID. In addition, the Town has enacted a net zero energy bylaw that will require the new school to include advanced, green alternative energy technology and building design.

This working draft has incorporated the recent changes as well as the engagement of the community of educators, parents and residents as part of the design process which began in January 2022.