

As the new year approaches, your ATSD Board of Education would like to share with you a brief review of the work we've completed in 2019. While it's been a very busy year, we've tried to maintain a focus on improving the financial condition of the District while also renewing our commitment to the core academic programs that our students will rely on most as they advance through high school and into whatever course of work or study that they may choose.

### **New Board Members**

In 2019 we've welcomed six new members to the Board; Cat Dobak, Wanda Quinones, Brad Patkochis, Bill Prouty, Mike Small, and Doug Walker. Each has added new enthusiasm and their own perspective to our work.

### **New Superintendent and Business Administrator**

We were very fortunate to have Dr. Ronald Bolandi join us as Superintendent (Interim) in August. Dr. Bolandi has spent the past 45 years helping to create positive outcomes for New Jersey students. He has experience in both large and small districts and his strong work ethic and back-to-basics approach to problem solving have been widely welcomed in our schools.

The ATSD Board has also endeavored to enter into a new shared-services agreement with the Holland Township School District that will provide us with a new part-time Business Administrator as well as future opportunities to cut costs by combining some of our purchasing activity with the Holland Twsp. School District.

### **Academics**

It is the highest obligation of everyone involved in the Alexandria Township School District to ensure we are providing our children with the best possible education that we can afford and yet, many of us shared a concern coming into 2019 that our commitment to excellence in academics was being dulled by other initiatives. Even before his official arrival in our district, Superintendent Bolandi shared our concerns and expressed his commitment to a comprehensive review of anything and everything that contributes to our students' success. Schedule changes planned for AMS in January, 2020 are the first sign that Dr. Bolandi is following through and we look forward to further improvements to both schedules and curriculum in the coming school year.

### **Increased Public Access to the Board's Work**

The Board began the year by voting to reinstate Committee of the Whole, a form of board governance where all board members can participate in most of the committee work that the Board does. In addition to our board members being more involved, Committee of the Whole necessitates a second public meeting each month which gives the community additional access to our deliberations and the information we use in those deliberations.

We believe the public should have easy access to the Board's work, should feel welcome when attending our meetings, and should be able to share opinions with us in a way that is both convenient and effective. To that end, we added a second "Public Comments" period to the agenda for every meeting, began making audio recordings of our meetings available to the public via the District website, and implemented a system where your emails to the Board email address ([BOE@AlexandriaSchools.org](mailto:BOE@AlexandriaSchools.org)) are not only distributed to the individual Board members immediately upon being received, but also generate an automatic response so you'll know that we've received your correspondence.

## **Buildings and Grounds**

Maintaining our facilities is an essential component of district operations. A safe and healthy environment in which our children can learn, and in which our teachers can teach, contributes to everyone's success and well being. The most pressing of the District's facilities problems were addressed this past summer via projects that were limited in scope due to limited available funding. More recently, the Board approved a substantial commitment of just over two million dollars to begin replacing some of the roughly eighty five percent of our roof systems that are long overdue for replacement. During our independent financial audit, with input from Dr. Bolandi, unspent and excess monies that had been committed to other projects were identified and redirected by the Board to our facilities needs. The Board also agreed to spend down some of the million-plus-dollar reserves that the District had been maintaining for a number of years.

## **Annual Climate Survey**

It's incumbent upon the Board to know that our schools are being well run and to that end we've turned to what is commonly referred to as a "Climate Survey". Rather than waiting for problems to find us, a climate survey allows students, teachers, and parents to weigh in on a variety of topics via a survey that each group takes. The data that is presented to us, along with other data that we receive throughout the year, contributes to our understanding of whether or not our policies are creating the school district that is expected by our community. It's considered a "best practice" within the state to do a complete climate survey each year and that's what we intend to do.

## **Appointment of New Legal Counsel and Independent Auditor**

Professional services are reviewed annually and it's considered best practice to change providers from time to time in order to have fresh perspectives involved in and around our work. With that in mind, the Board decided this year to request proposals for both our legal services and our independent financial audit needs which resulted in both of those positions being changed to new providers.

## **In Summary**

It's been an extremely busy year and we greatly appreciate the support that we've received from the community as we've worked to become a more effective school board. We'd like to thank Gwen Thorton of the New Jersey School Boards Association for tirelessly supporting and encouraging our work. Thank you also to our teachers, administrators, and staff for staying focused on the job of educating our students despite the many changes and disruptions, such as the boiler malfunction at AMS, that have happened.

As always, thank you for the efforts of the Alexandria Parent-Teacher Organization, the Alexandria Twsp. Education Foundation, the Polyphonic Parents' Organization, and the Alexandria Sports Boosters Club.

Even with all of the progress we've made in 2019, there will always be room for improvement. In 2020 we're looking forward to increased collaboration with our neighboring DelVal sending districts and to creating a long term financial plan that will ensure core academics will be appropriately funded and emphasized for years to come.