



October 21, 2016

**TO:** Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Members

**FROM:** Deborah E. Bookis, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning  
Dawn G. Bentley, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

**RE:** *Expanding Our Notion of Success* School Committee Presentation Transcript

Thank you again for the opportunity to share some of the work we have come to call "Expanding Our Notion of Success." Please find the transcript from our School Committee presentation last evening below.

Tonight we want to start with a story about expanding our notion of success. In past presentations, you've heard me say that storytelling is one of the most effective instructional tools we possess. That's because stories connect us to our past, tell us where we are from, tell our present state of being, and help us think about the future. Stories connect us to one another, and they tell us who we are and where we belong. We wove our story around three critical questions:

- Why must we expand our notion of success?
- How do we expand that notion of success?
- What does an expanded notion of success look like? Sound like? Feel like?

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## **Why must we expand our notion of success?**

Every student has a story - impacted by the community, his/her family, and the school system. Some are open books and some take longer to know and understand, but that's our work. We need to know our students and know their stories so we can effectively meet their needs. Their experiences, prior learning, life situations - all are important for us to know.

We need to know and accept the changing demographic makeup of our schools and our community. We need to know how changes in interpersonal communication, *where everyone has a smartphone*, impacts our relationships and learning. We need to know how so many of the decisions we make about how we 'do school' impacts our students' well-being. We simply cannot just 'do school' like we did ten years ago without actively thinking about the students- no, the **individuals**- who are in front of us today.

We want *all* of our students to have "good" stories when they leave A-B. But in order to be intentional in this endeavor, we need to challenge our *current* notion of success, which today is defined by high test scores,

extracurricular involvement, and a strong college resume. Instead, we must move towards **a definition of success that students, parents, staff, and our community all share.**

So let's pause and think for a moment about our definition of success. Dr. Denise Pope, co-founder of the Challenge Success work out of Stanford, asks us that question in this video, titled *How Parents and Kids Define Success Differently*: <https://youtu.be/cX7Ey6tQ3tU>.

This video is a powerful reminder of why we must expand our notion of success.

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## **How do we expand our notion of success?**

One way is to never stop learning . . . never stop incorporating the latest research . . . never stop thinking about ways to incorporate new materials and ideas. As district leaders, we must work to inspire a *community* of learners, which is all-encompassing, because *this* notion of community includes our students, our staff, and the broader A-B community.

Last year, our District Leadership Team, comprised of over 50 leaders, drafted a new vision statement, a set of values, and a mission statement, which we presented to you for review at our last School Committee meeting. These three elements- vision, values, and mission- were born from our leaders critically examining our 'why' at A-B, and they ultimately speak to our desire to expand our notion of success. This past summer, we convened two different leadership teams over four days, to review broad stakeholder feedback and to refine our 'why' (vision), our 'how' (values), and our 'what' (mission).

And, as you know, last spring, nearly 3000 of our students in grades 6-12 took the Challenge Success survey.

*At **Challenge Success**, [they] believe that our society has become too focused on grades, test scores, and performance, leaving little time for kids to develop the necessary skills to become resilient, ethical, and motivated learners. Challenge Success provides families and schools with the practical, research-based tools they need to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for kids. **After all, success is measured over the course of a lifetime, not at the end of a semester.***

This past summer, leaders from across the district reviewed the Challenge Success survey data and, in collaboration with the research team at Stanford, identified three high-leverage areas on which we would focus over the next few years: Homework/workload, Scheduling, and Family Communication and Engagement. This work represents our initial attempts to begin expanding our notion of success.

On our November 8th professional learning day, our building leaders will share the work they are doing in these three high-leverage areas with our entire school staff.

This year's **Family Learning Series** is structured around topics related to health and wellness, and we just recently added *Five to Thrive: A Conversation About the Stresses of Parenting Kids Today* with Maria Trozzi, which will be held on November 14th at 7:00PM at RJGJHS. Dr. Denise Pope, whom we just watched in that

short video clip, will spend the afternoon of November 8th with our district-wide staff, and present *The Well-Balanced Student* to parents at 7pm, so go vote and then come to her presentation!

Additionally in the area of family communication and engagement, we recently launched an AB Wellness website at <http://abschoolswellness.weebly.com>. Superintendent Brand highlighted this website in a recent communication to families and staff, and it was also prominent in our October edition of the *Expanding our Notion of Success* newsletter. While still a work in progress, this site is a place for our learning community to find digital and print resources to support children's health and well-being, as well as ways to learn about and get involved in promoting wellness.

Finally, each month, we are compiling an *Expanding Our Notion of Success* newsletter to highlight work across the district in these three areas, as well as key strategies for families to use in supporting their children's health and well-being. Family communication and engagement is critical, because it will take all of us, including our larger community, to understand the need to redefine 'success' as we know it. One thing is clear- the challenges that face us today cannot be solved by our schools *alone*.

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### **What does an expanded notion of success look like? Sound like? Feel like?**

By the time students graduate from A-B, we want to **see**:

- Their engagement in learning
- That they have had equitable access to learning that meets their unique needs

By the time students graduate from A-B, we want to **hear**:

- Their stories about collaborative, supportive relationships
- How they have been inspired to learn all along the way

By the time students graduate from A-B, we want them to **feel**:

- Like we don't just look at them as test scores and college admission rates
- That we have supported their health and well-being all along their Pre-K through Grade 12 journey

This work will take all of us to help ensure our students leave A-B with *great* stories.