

# Leaving Andover's public schools in good hands

By Sheldon Berman | Jan 7, 2021 | Source: [AndoverTownsmen.com](http://AndoverTownsmen.com)



Retiring from school district leadership is a mixed blessing. While it is a moment of transition culminating a long and satisfying career, it also means bidding farewell to people and a district I care about deeply. I will greatly miss my work here, along with the staff, parents and community members who have collaborated with me to move Andover forward.

Having led four districts over nearly three decades, I can attest that Andover is most fortunate to have exceptional administrative leaders and dedicated and talented teachers who support student success. Andover is a special place both as a community and as a school district. What stands out is the willingness of its administrators and staff to tackle challenges, make informed adjustments and find innovative ways to enrich student learning.

It has been a privilege to join hands with this staff, and I thank them for working with me to propel the district toward new levels of achievement.

In addition, Andover features supportive and involved parents who volunteer in classrooms, help the PTO or PAC raise funds and speak at School Committee and community meetings. Every day, parents' engagement makes this district more successful for all our students.

Reflecting on the past five and a half years, I am astounded at how much progress we made in such a short time.

We addressed dyslexia and other language-based learning difficulties, advancing reading skills for all groups of students.

We reduced class sizes, particularly at the elementary level, enabling teachers to better reach each child, and we successfully launched a high school schedule that better supports student learning.

Teachers and administrators analyze data to identify student strengths and needs, and they have progress-monitoring tools to guide them in adjusting instruction to reach all students.

We initiated such innovations as maker spaces, the Andover High School innovation lab, capstone projects and the Global Pathways program—all of which present authentic learning experiences.

We are also creating an exciting elementary curriculum that integrates social studies, literacy and the arts, while guiding students to become engaged citizens.

We integrated social-emotional learning into the structure of students' experience, implementing Responsive Classroom morning meetings at the elementary level, Where Everybody Belongs at the middle schools and H-1 advisory at the high school, so that students feel known and valued.

We made culturally responsive instruction a priority and clarified our determination to provide identity-safe schools. And by strengthening our programs, we enabled more students with special needs to successfully remain in-district.

We solidified resources within the annual budget to implement a curriculum replacement cycle, along with professional development to sustain staff growth. And with the leadership of the School Committee, we expanded learning time and eliminated tuition for full-day kindergarten.

We made significant progress in upgrading our facilities with a new West Elementary and Shawsheen on the way, plans to renovate or replace the high school, an initial design to renovate Doherty Middle School, air conditioning added at High Plain Elementary and Wood Hill Middle with plans for other schools, and sound enhancement systems installed in all K-8 classrooms.

Plus, we stepped up to the extraordinarily difficult task of serving students and families during a pandemic so that Andover's children could continue making progress within the community of learners that you have helped to nurture.

Numerous other advances—too many to list here—were made possible by the collaboration of countless dedicated people who demonstrated a willingness to tackle problems, an openness to new ideas and a commitment to giving their absolute best for the sake of the children. I remain profoundly impressed by and grateful to the administrators, faculty and staff who confronted these challenges and transformed them into opportunities for growth and advancement.

So many individuals and groups supported our work and deserve acknowledgement.

Andover Coalition for Education tirelessly raised funds to sustain innovation and stood beside us as we ventured into new terrain. We could not ask for better partners in this work.

Credit is also due to each school's PTO or PAC leaders, our athletics and arts booster organizations, Andona, and many others who offered financial and emotional backing for our efforts.

The School Committee members who served during my time here courageously supported the initiatives that the district pursued and worked diligently on the district's behalf.

And though we always have probing conversations about how to best balance the town's financial needs, I believe that the town administration, the town manager, the Select Board and the Finance Committee are sincere advocates of all we have done and all we strive to be. These candid discussions and the support of the town leaders

have made our improvements possible. I thank all of them for their years of encouragement and collaboration.

It has been an honor to serve as superintendent in Andover. I have appreciated and enjoyed this opportunity and learned much along the way that I will carry into the work I undertake in the future.

What I value most are my relationships with the faculty and staff and with the dedicated parents and community members who have helped us along the way.

I wish Andover nothing but the best in the years ahead, and I will be watching from afar the many wonderful accomplishments yet to unfold.

Sheldon Berman just retired as superintendent of the Andover Public Schools.