## **School Talk**

## **November 9, 2018**

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**SCHOOL BOND PASSES**

This past Tuesday, 82% of Arlington residents voted yes to approve a school bond of $103,000,000, to finance (along with other funds) various capital projects for APS. The money will be used to help finance the following APS projects:

* New Elementary School at the Reed Building $44.25 million
* Career Center/Arlington Tech Internal Renovation (HS Seats) $ 6.00 million
* Career Center Project, planning and design funds $ 5.90 million
* Education Center Renovation (HS Seats) $32.25 million
* Major Infrastructure Projects (MC/MM) $14.60 million

You can read more about the bond here: https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Bond2018.pdf

**PROGRAM NEWS**

**Substitute for APS!** Want to spend more time in our classrooms and get paid for it? Apply to be an APS substitute teacher or assistant. It’s a straightforward process. You only need a college degree (for substitute teacher) or high school diploma (for substitute assistant) and 2 letters of reference. More information at <https://www.apsva.us/apply-today/substitute-teacher-and-substitute-assistant/> We are always running short of substitutes and our school would love to have a pool of parents to work with.

**Verification of Income Paperwork** By now, families of 4 year olds in Montessori should have received a request from APS to provide verification of income paperwork to the Office of Early Childhood Education. Please get this paperwork in ASAP. If you have any questions, you should e-mail Ms. Tara Cassidy at tara.cassidy@apsva.us.

**4th Grade Montessori Swimming Continues** The 4th grade Montessori students have one more day of swimming on Tuesday, November 13th, so please make sure they come to school with their swimwear and towels.

**Help Shape Next Year’s School Year Calendar** APS is asking for input from the community about next year’s calendar. Input last year is why we get two weeks off this Winter! You have until November 21 to take the survey, found here: <https://www.apsva.us/engage/engage-aps-online-feedback/>

**Bus Route Reconfiguration** If your child is currently on one of the buses - **614, 411, 406 or 518**, then please be aware that your assigned route and/or pick-up time may be changing, effective November 26. Please follow this [LINK](https://msg.schoolmessenger.com/m/?s=JC58cRNvJrY&mal=500b9f62b9c5235bbbc0f0ba518a9f254b9accc7423d0742b23ba88d910b6f04) to see the modified schedule. As was explained at the last PTA meeting, the reconfiguration was done to ensure all routes are fair and equitable and no child spends more than an hour on the bus (as is currently the case with several children). The reconfiguration has been done in a way to make all bus routes more efficient. All pick-up/drop-off times that have been negatively impacted have been kept to a maximum of 13 minutes - as was agreed at the last PTA meeting. If you have any questions or concerns, please email Kristin Haldeman at [kristin.haldeman@apsva.us](mailto:kristin.haldeman@apsva.us). Feedback period will close at noon, **Wednesday, November 14.**

**TEACHERS CORNER**

**From Ms. Shakespeare (Montessori Music):** The following Montessori students auditioned for the APS Elementary Honors Chorus and were accepted!

* Maddie Dean *(Lopatkiewicz)*
* Kayla Grant *(Pirro)*
* Charlotte Harold *(Ross)*

Congratulations! We are still awaiting the results of the Jr. Honors Band and Orchestra.

**From Ms. Reeser (Montessori Counselor**): November 12-16 is **National Career Development Week**. During this month, students in all grades will be receiving guidance lessons to promote self-awareness of their skills, learn about career clusters and relate their education to future job success. Students will be introduced to the website Virginia Career View and be encouraged to engage in some of the learning activities promoted on that website. If you have a career that you are passionate about, and are willing to do a ***“Career Cafe Skype”*** from your workplace with our upper elementary students, please email the school counselor ([diane.reeser@apsva.us](mailto:diane.reeser@apsva.us)) with your contact information and a brief job description. ***“Career Cafe Skype”*** will take place in the spring during the lunch period. Students who choose to participate will be able to hear about a career topic of interest and ask questions in real time.

**PTA NEWS**

**The Makers Fair is ON!** We have enough people to hold this event. Thank you to those of you who registered. You will receive more information from us as the date gets closer.

At our next **PTA General Meeting**, we will have people from the Virginia 529 Plan come out and explain it all to us, from A to Z! College may seem like a long way off, especially if you have kiddoes who haven’t even reached double digits yet, but time flies fast and tuition rates keep going up, so it’s never too early to think about planning, even if you aren’t ready to invest now. Our meeting will be **November 14th** in the library of the **Patrick Henry Elementary School** *(701 S. Highland Street)* from **7PM to 8:30PM**

**UPCOMING DATES:**

* Monday, November 12th: Veterans’ Day Holiday, NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS
* Tuesday, November 13th: Last day of 4th Grade Swimming
* Wednesday, November 14th: PTA General Meeting feat. Va529 Plan Info. 7PM at Patrick Henry ES.
* Saturday, November 17th: Lost Dog Café fundraiser, Columbia Pike location, 11AM to 10PM

**LINKS**

* Arlington Montessori Program on APS: <https://drew.apsva.us/the-montessori-program/>
* Principal Genove on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CSGenove>
* Engage with APS https://www.apsva.us/engage/
* Lunch Menus: https://apsva.nutrislice.com/menus-eula-splash
* Arlington Montessori PTA: <https://acmpta.com/>.

**A MONTESSORI MOMENT**

**This week’s feature is an article published by the Washington Post this past Monday, November 5th.**

**Montessori, long a favorite for wealthy families, struggles to expand its reach**

*Laura Meckler, National education writer covering national trends, federal policy and the Education Department.*

In this preschool classroom, children have fun, but they also work. They cut up bananas (and then wash out the bowl), screw bolts into a board, polish silver and sort small rings onto a board by color.

“Look how much work you got done when you weren’t talking with friends and were focusing!” Marissa Howser, a teacher at Breakthrough Montessori in the District, tells one little girl.

It’s an unusual approach to preschool, and a departure from the play-based programs some schools employ and the culture of accountability and testing found elsewhere.

For three hours each morning, children ages 3, 4 and 5 move at their own pace, working by themselves or in pairs, sprawling on the floor or sitting at small tables scattered across the sunny classroom. They choose from activities that are tucked into every nook of the room: cutting and coloring or, for more advanced students, working with math tiles and letters.

For decades, this quirky branch of education has appealed mostly to wealthy parents. Drawing low-income families has been much harder.

Now, the world’s richest man aims to broaden the reach. Jeffrey P. Bezos, founder and chief executive of Amazon.com, and his wife, MacKenzie Bezos, [pledged](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/09/13/bezos-pledges-billion-help-homeless-families-launch-network-preschools/?utm_term=.ad44882537c4) in September to fund a new network of “Montessori-inspired,” tuition-free preschools for low-income children.

Bezos, who owns The Washington Post, said the Day One Fund would start with $2 billion for the preschool network and aid for homeless families. “The money spent there is going to pay gigantic dividends for decades,” Bezos [said](https://www.economicclub.org/events/jeff-bezos) at the Economic Club of Washington.

Bezos and his staff have offered few details, although he did say he would launch and operate his own network of schools, a contrast to other philanthropists who have supported public schools.

Bezos attended a Montessori school in Albuquerque for about a year and a half, starting when he was about 2½ years old. In 2000, he [told](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/0e28a613cf5e40a5c7a457727/files/b9164cd0-a5cb-454b-97dc-79f963e1bdc8/Jeff_Bezos_Montessori_Life_Winter_2000.pdf) Montessori Life magazine that he remembered painting on a large easel and using a special board to learn to tie his shoes. The Breakthrough classrooms have similar boards today.

“It’s amazing,” Bezos told the magazine, “what a good program it was.”

His mother, Jackie Bezos, has long been a backer of early-childhood education through the Bezos Family Foundation. [Other tech industry leaders](https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/09/26/the-montessori-mafia-why-tech-titans-like.html) have talked warmly about their Montessori educations, including Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page.

Now, Bezos wants to transfer his enthusiasm to communities that have long been passed over. Experts say the problem has been twofold — lack of access to high-quality Montessori and lack of interest in its unusual approach.

Montessori education is marked by considerable freedom but within prescribed limits. Children choose their own activities, which are referred to as “work” rather than “play.” They work independently, at their own pace and over long blocks of uninterrupted time, with teachers steering children to the next lesson when they seem ready. The classrooms use prescribed materials, mostly wooden, designed to help children learn certain concepts. Children are in classes spanning a three-year age range.

Imaginary play, a traditional marker of childhood, is allowed — but only at recess.

Kiesha Campbell, who lives east of the Anacostia River and has 6-year-old twins, had heard people mention Montessori before, but she wasn’t really sure what it was. Then a preschool teacher mentioned that such a program might be a good fit for her son, Kendon, who was proving to be a fast learner.

“He needs to be able to move as he learns without waiting for the rest of the students,” she recalls being told. She enrolled the twins in Shining Stars Montessori, a D.C. charter school, for kindergarten, and loves how the children dig up worms to study science and make maps of South America to learn about geography.

“My children have never come home to say they are bored in class today,” she said. “They might be tired, but not bored.”

It’s not clear how many Montessori schools are operating nationwide. Some in the field have cited 5,000, but an effort to count schools turned up about half that.

The approach at Montessori schools is a contrast to other approaches, including the no-excuses, high-accountability programs that are popular in some poor communities.

The difference is unsettling to some families, said Keith Whitescarver, executive director of the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, an advocacy and support group. “If you walk into a classroom, you see people working independently and not working as a group, and it’s a strange experience.”

The Montessori approach to preschool was founded in 1907 by an Italian doctor, Maria Montessori, who worked in Rome with disabled and poor children. But when Montessori schools came to the United States, they tended to be the exclusive province of ­upper-income families who could afford the tuition.

Montessori began to diversify in the 1970s. School systems facing court orders to desegregate opened Montessori magnet programs to draw white children to predominantly African American schools. It worked. But because the schools were popular with white families and because school integration policies made it easier for white children to be admitted, fewer spots remained for children of color.

“If you really want to get in here, you can’t be black,” a Montessori educator from Prince George’s County, Md., told families, according to a history of Montessori being published next spring by Mira Debs, who directs the Education Studies Program at Yale University.

After courts lifted desegregation orders, schools often relocated to wealthier areas, Debs writes.

A fresh wave of interest in Montessori arrived with charter schools, which are privately run public schools. There are now more than 500 public Montessoris nationally, many of them charters, and it’s how most low-income children access Montessori education.

ome are in low-income communities. The nonprofit Lumin Education in Dallas, for instance, serves 600 children from birth through age 9, using the Montessori philosophy at every level.

“Montessori is highly effective for kids of all different backgrounds. That includes kids from the poorest families,” said Terry Ford, the group’s executive director. Some academic research shows Montessori is more effective than other methods in helping low-income students catch up to their wealthier peers.

But many public Montessori schools still draw students primarily from wealthier parts of town. Experts point to limited recruitment among low-income families, a complicated enrollment process and overwhelming demand from white, middle-class parents.

A 2016 study published by Debs in the Journal of Montessori Research found 6 in 10 public Montessori schools had a lower proportion of students of color than their surrounding districts, and two-thirds had fewer poor children. The gap was even greater for Montessori charter schools, where 71 percent had a lower proportion of poor children.

Montessori enrollment among white children has grown, Debs found, while black student enrollment has not. “Public Montessori is whiter than it used to be,” she wrote.

In the District, nearly half of all public school students attend charter schools. Of those, 6 percent are white, while 44 percent are categorized as “at risk,” which includes children who are homeless, in the foster care system and whose families receive cash welfare or food stamp benefits.

But at Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School, 42 percent of students were white, and just 8.6 percent were classified as at-risk in 2016-2017, the school’s first year and the most recent year for which [data](https://www.dcpcsb.org/school/breakthrough-montessori-pcs) is available. Similar demographics mark other D.C. Montessori schools.

That’s partly because lower-income families might not know about Montessori education and may be looking for a more structured program such as KIPP, whose schools are known for emphasizing achievement and expectations, said Madeline Karp, director of programs and communications at DCSRN, formerly known as DC School Reform Now, which helps families navigate the school lottery used to place children. She said families tend to favor programs popular with their friends and neighbors.

A dearth of Montessori programs in low-income neighborhoods is another factor. “The big concern for parents is transportation and proximity. They don’t want their children to go halfway across the city,” Karp said.

Whitescarver, who helped create the Breakthrough school and is president of its board, said the school’s location was chosen to draw an integrated student body.

The school opened in the Petworth neighborhood in Northwest Washington and is transitioning to a new building in Takoma, both middle-class neighborhoods. Many of the students come from the surrounding areas.

Whitescarver said organizers feared that opening the school east of the river would dissuade white families from attending. Allison Jones, director of student support at Breakthrough, said the school wants more students from low-income families and is working to recruit them.

“This is something we’re super aware of,” she said. “It’s in our mission statement to bring Montessori to people who don’t have access.”