

## **Grant Proposal Application**

No. 2007- 1

**Project Title** HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT, YR 3

**Applicant(s) Name(s)** Charles Skidmore                      **Position(s) or Title(s)** Principal  
Arlington High School

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**Is This a Multiyear Project?**              **No (Funds requested for Sept-June 2007. )**

**Amount Requested**      \$65,000.

**For ASF Board use only. Please leave this section blank.**

**1) What questions (if any) does the applicant need to answer for the Board?**

- A.
- B.
- C.

**2) Preliminary assessment:**

- a) need more information
- b) information complete, proceed with evaluation

**3) Comments:**

**A. Overview:** In one page or less, summarize the focus of your project. Your overview should include the following:

- one or two paragraphs summarizing program/project;
- how the proposal is compatible with ASF mission of enhancing educational excellence in the public schools
- how the program/project will bring substantial improvements at the High School;
- how it reflects current research and best practices

### **2007 Proposal**

Two years of planning and Improvement Team meetings have brought about several changes at Arlington High School. The “Good To Great” team of 2004 – 2005 pointed the school community toward

communication and consistency in its application of school rules. The School Improvement Subcommittee (SIS) of 2005 – 2006 monitored the focus on community and consistency and developed it further. From this collaboration, a new mission statement for the High School was developed which includes learning expectations that we refer to as “habits of mind” These are characteristics that cross over all areas of life: **integrity, kindness, communication, accountability and responsibility.** This reflects the mission of ASF in its broadest sense: educational excellence for all learners.

As a result of the work of both the “Good To Great” team of 2004 – 2005 and the SIS of 2005 – 2006, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Plan for the Arlington Public Schools the following proposal for ASF funding for 2006 – 2007 is presented.

This proposal is consistent with the steps to improvement outlined in *Good To Great* by Jim Collins, the core text that has guided the AHS’s improvement focus and the focus of ASF funding. Collins states that an organization can improve if the people in the organization decide what they want to accomplish. Collins also states that great and important change corresponds to a “flywheel theory of momentum”, where change comes in small increments over time so that it can sustain itself. Finally, Collins encourages a sense of passion for the work to grow organically within the organization.

The AHS faculty is a strong community of veteran and young educators. AHS teachers have worked diligently over the past two years to observe the strengths and challenges of the school. They are consistent in their recommendation for improved communication and consistency across the school community. This proposal will allow teachers to communicate with one another in small and large groups and provide consistency in teacher practice and use of technology across the curriculum. This proposal keeps momentum for change moving at AHS with strong supports and resources that will promote a passion for strong teaching across the school and the curriculum.

## **B. Description:**

### **Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model**

On Wednesday, July 26, Superintendent Levenson presented a report, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Knowledge, and Habits of Mind, to the Arlington School Committee. The report, based on the Superintendent’s synthesis of several highly regarded education experts and feedback from AHS teachers, students, and community members listed several potential changes for the Arlington Public Schools. Many of those changes focus on instructional improvement or a heightened teacher awareness of pedagogical strategies that are student-centered and based on higher order thinking skills. Some of the recommendations from the report are:

- 1 The need to create independent learners, with a solid foundation of critical skills and knowledge. There are many ways of fostering independent learning including research papers, long term projects, or even online coursework. Much more discussion with staff is needed to determine the methods of providing more independent learning opportunities, to prepare our students who must master a great deal of new content as adults.
- 2 The need to prepare students who are resilient, adaptable and cope well with the unknown.
- 3 Emphasis should be placed equally on analyzing and synthesizing information in addition to a solid understanding of history, grammar, literature, math facts, etc. This potentially alters the goals and forms of assessment in some disciplines.
- 4 To address work ethic issues and to create a love of learning, many of the experts and many of the parents recommend long terms projects, interdisciplinary studies, performance based assessments, and culminating events like a junior year project or senior thesis. All can incorporate a degree of students selecting the topics. Issues like attendance and on time assignments become important work skills.
- 5 Non college tracks should still include high expectations for reading, writing, mathematical

reasoning, higher order thinking, strong work habits and other skills valued by the market place. This could incorporate more student interaction with local businesses, non profits, and universities. All students should be provided an education that will allow for college either upon graduation or later in life.

- 6 The need for explicit instruction in group dynamics and teamwork. This could include modeling collaboration between staff and schools.
- 7 Incorporating more group projects, while addressing the difficulty of fairly assessing individual contribution and achievement, as well as team effort.
- 8 Incorporate more higher-order thinking and inquiry into more courses.
- 9 Create more opportunities for independent learning, especially around long term projects.
- 10 Continue to support a rigorous, standards based, articulated, K-12 curriculum that recognizes the centrality of the classroom, the importance of excellent teachers, and provides a solid foundation in 20th century core subjects as the basis for any 21st century additions. Twenty first century education builds on, not replaces, the values and strengths of the Arlington Public Schools.

AHS teachers endorse these suggested changes, and propose that the **school adopt a collaborative coaching and learning (CCL) model** to implement and create these instructional changes. The **CCL model empowers master teachers to work with teacher teams or pairs to improve instruction**. The master teacher creates and models exemplary lessons for his or her team to observe. The master teacher then works with his or her team to help them create and implement similar lessons. When a team member implements a lesson, both the master teacher and other team members observe the lesson, then gather together to debrief the successes and challenges of the lesson. The master teacher and the team continue working through an eight week cycle to ensure mastery of the concept.

AHS teachers support the use of CCL because it allows them to **learn from one another and to break the isolation and anonymity of teaching in a large school**. CCL is an excellent vehicle for bringing the **consistency and communication** recommended by the 2004 – 2005 “Good To Great” team. A teacher’s day gets crowded and rushed very easily. CCL allows for **time for teachers to observe one another and talk about their practice**. This kind of collaboration and reflection on practice is standard in most professions, but almost unheard of in teaching. CCL will allow AHS faculty to **share best practices and implement consistently the new approaches** recommended in the Superintendent’s report. CCL will also **allow teachers to work together** as they implement the ambitious **new mission statement that calls for an increased focus on integrity, accountability and responsibility, and kindness**.

#### **Shared Leadership**

A growing movement in the school that will mirror CCL is the realization of a need for shared responsibility for activities such as the yearbook, the prom, student social activities and multicultural events. A coordinator will be appointed utilizing funds from the MLK Committee so that the teachers have a model for engaging disengaged students in co-curricular activities. Most important is including students of color and students from other cultures.

#### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Coordinator**

As stated above, the 2005 – 2006 SIS has revised the school’s mission statement to focus on habits of mind and virtues consistent with the Superintendent’s recommendations for the APS. The virtues and habits of mind that will serve as a focus for SY 2006 – 2007 are **accountability and responsibility, integrity, communication, and kindness**. Although those virtues and habits of mind will be important across the curriculum and in all aspects of school life, they will be extremely important for the Class of 2007 as the first class that must fulfill a forty-hour community service requirement in order to graduate. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Coordinator would **help students craft quality projects/experiences that reflect the “habits of mind” essential to succeed in the world ,connect the school to the community, infuse a passion in AHS students for learning through volunteerism and community service, and provide a project experience that will provide opportunities for independent thinking and an improved work ethic**. These goals also echo two changes recommended by the Superintendent’s report:

- 1 To address work ethic issues and to create a love of learning, many of the experts and many of the parents recommend long terms projects, interdisciplinary studies, performance based assessments, and culminating events like a junior year project or senior thesis. All can incorporate a degree of students selecting the topics. Issues like attendance and on time assignments become important work skills.
- 2 Create more opportunities for independent learning, especially around long term projects.

### **Transition Projects**

The Good To Great team recommended more collaboration between and among teachers. One of the activities that arose from that recommendation was the Grade 9 Common Planning Time (CPT). Grade 9 CPT allowed nine teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> graders and the AHS Principal to meet on a regular basis to discuss academic issues, case management, and student behavior. Although the group completed projects such as a reading skills survey and quarterly analysis of student report cards, a regular topic of discussion was providing more transitional activities for Grade 9 students. Activities would include off campus activities such as rope courses or other field trips to promote bonding and trust between and among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and teachers, explicit teaching of organizational and study skills, a homework club, and other activities that support students, welcome them, and promote a sense of fun and camaraderie at the high school.

### **Technology Across the Curriculum**

AHS teachers are anxious to employ technology in the classrooms as part of both the consistency and communication initiatives promoted by the improvement subcommittees of the past two years. The Superintendent also made it clear in his 21<sup>st</sup> century report that an emphasis in technology is extremely important for student success. The report includes these recommendations:

- 1 Staff receiving professional development and incorporating IM, email, threaded online discussions and blogs as a way of interacting with students in a manner they are likely to use in college and on the job.
- 2 Embed basic computer skills across the curriculum.

Teachers would work with the school's Instructional Technician or other technology expert to create and implement projects that support AHS technology graduation requirements and deepen investigative aspect of curriculum-related projects and assignments.

### **Critical Friends Coordinator**

AHS has made an alliance with the teaching arm of the Harvard Divinity School (HDS) for SY 2006 – 2007. This alliance will place 8 HDS student teachers at AHS for the fall term of 2006 – 2007. The student teachers and their Harvard coordinator, whose focus is using inquiry as a primary method of teaching, will act as a group of critical friends. They will share their inquiry-based lessons and provide feedback on AHS as a school community working toward promoting a mission statement that promotes values and habits of mind. The inquiry focus of the HDS meets one of the Superintendent's final recommendations for change:

- 1 Incorporate more higher order thinking and inquiry into more courses.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Group**

The office of the superintendent, in collaboration with AHS and ASF, will form a 15 person committee which brings together a variety of community members who represent unique and traditional vocational paths, as well as staff and students and administrators to discuss how learning at AHS should adapt to the changing educational needs in the global economy. This will be an expanded function of the School Improvement Committee and will meet 3 times a year.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES: How will you measure whether the project meets its goals and outcomes? To insure that the feedback loop for the High School Improvement initiative is complete, the SIS will continue to meet to provide the following:

- 1 A structure that works with the principal to provides on going teacher and student voice into all improvement initiatives at the High School
- 1 A constant communication stream with staff, across all disciplines, regarding the continuation of “Good to Great” work in all of its forms. This will include the focus on making the mission statement become an active component of planning and teaching
- 2 A pre and post evaluation of all new initiatives that are coordinated by stipended positions.

**2. Interim written report filed with ASF by the principal in March . This will include the reports from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Coordinator, Critical Friends Group Coordinator and the Educational Technology specialist.**

## **Budget Narrative (revised 9/06)\***

### Coaches -- To implement Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model -- \$30,000

Coaches will work with pairs or teams of teachers to model and plan exemplary lessons, allow for teachers in the CCL pair or team to observe one another and to debrief after watching classroom teaching. \$3,000 stipend per eight week unit.

### School Improvement Committee – To monitor implementation of new mission statement and Good To Great focus --\$10,000

The committee will meet monthly, and as needed, to consider implementation issues and other areas of interest as directed by students, staff, or parents. This group will be expanded for 3 meetings that focus specifically on 21st century learning .(see 21st Learning Twenty faculty members @ \$500 stipend per teacher for the year.

### 21<sup>st</sup> century learning Coordinator – To work with class of 2007 on community service requirement -- \$7,500

The 21st century learning coordinator will reinforce the high school’s new mission statement focusing on responsibility and kindness by helping students to engage in quality community service projects that reflect the habits of mind essential for successful life experiences and connect the school to the wider Arlington community. 1 adviser at \$7500

### Transition Projects – To create a smoother transition for entering Grade 9 students -- \$6,000

Grade 9 students can easily feel isolated and out of control unless specific activities are created to make them feel welcomed and a part of the high school. Projects proposed include field trips such as a rope climbing activity or a Thompson Island outing early in the year to help students bond with one another and their teachers, ensuring a feeling of inclusion and comfort in high school.

### Technology Across the Curriculum – To create more use of technology in the classroom --\$6,000

Teachers would be paid stipends to attend classes that would teach them how to use technology to create

more student-centered lessons. Classes would focus on setting up websites, interactive blogs, and downloading video and digital images to include in student and teacher classroom presentations. 50 teachers @ \$100 stipend per teacher, per session attended; teacher must present project plan and proof of implementation before stipend is paid. 1 coordinator / teacher @ \$1,000

Substitutes – To replace teachers involved in CCL model -- \$3,000

Substitutes will be made available to cover classes when teachers are observing and debriefing other teacher's classroom practice. 50 days @ \$60 per day

Critical Friends Coordinator – To work with Harvard Divinity School student teachers -- \$2500

The coordinator will work intensively with 9 Harvard Divinity School students to collect ideas for creating an inquiry-based approach to teaching. 1 coordinator @\$2500

**Total -- \$65,000**

\*stipends may be adjusted

Send your proposal to **Arlington Schools Foundation, P. O. Box 80, Arlington, MA 02476**, or email a copy to [HSIP@arlingtonschoolsfoundation.org](mailto:HSIP@arlingtonschoolsfoundation.org)