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## North Andover elementary principals to shift schools

**By Grace Rubenstein**  
*Staff Writer*

NORTH ANDOVER -- For 10 years, whole classes of children have come and gone from the Thomson School and known Nancy Jukins as their principal. Children at the Sargent School have known John McAleer, the principal there for six years, the same way.

This fall, those familiar faces will change.

In a plan to bring all the elementary schools new expertise and a fresh start, Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian is transferring McAleer to the Atkinson School and Jukins to the Kittredge School. The principals at those schools -- Bette Ann Coyle at Atkinson and Joan Shea-Desmond at Kittredge -- plan to retire.

Harutunian also plans to remove the principal position -- vacated when Kathleen Callagy took early retirement last fall - - at the Bradstreet Early Childhood Center, which houses kindergarten classes. He will place the school under McAleer's watch.

Harutunian will hire new principals for Sargent and Thomson, and keep Pamela Lathrop at the helm of the Franklin School, where she started in 2002.

This way, he said, "We're all starting together and moving forward."

The move was spurred by suggestions from community members to bring greater equity to the schools, Harutunian said.

With its diverse population, he said, "Atkinson is a school that I personally believe could not afford a long transition period (under a new principal), and I didn't want them to miss a beat" when Coyle retires.

Harutunian would not say what he meant by "diverse," but for years Atkinson has had the highest number of children in the district who qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch, and the school's MCAS scores lag behind others in the district.

The superintendent decided that McAleer, who now runs the district's largest school, has the experience to take over Atkinson and would make a smoother transition than an outsider.

Jukins -- who oversaw the transition into a new Thomson School building in 2000 -- is well-prepared to plan the possible move from Kittredge into a new school at Foster Farm, Harutunian said. School leaders are considering closing Kittredge if the Foster Farm school is built, which could begin as early as 2010.

The idea for the move may be practical; the experience of it promises to be emotional.

"The kids are sad," Jukins said. "They wanted to know why I was leaving. I said, 'Because I'm ready to try some things we did at Thomson at a new school,' and they understand that."

Jukins is sad too, she said. She hired most of the teachers there, and the others she worked alongside as a fellow teacher for eight years before becoming principal. The move, she said, "is like leaving a family."

Since hearing the news, some Thomson parents and teachers have offered to campaign to keep her there, she said. She has told them no.

Beyond the sadness of leaving, Jukins is excited, she said, for the chance to grow in a new job and help plan the possible building of a new school at Foster Farm.

A new principal is "a new pair of eyes in a building, a new pair of eyes in a community," she said, "who can step back and see things that maybe need to be done. I think it's a lot easier to implement change when you're coming on board new."

At Sargent, McAleer said, some teachers have already shed tears -- but he is looking forward to "a wonderful challenge."

Part of that challenge will be strengthening the ties between kindergarten and first grade districtwide, which Harutunian hopes the merging of Bradstreet and Atkinson under one principal will achieve, since some kindergarten classes are

housed at Atkinson. The change will save some money on a principal's salary at Bradstreet, Harutunian said, but he does not yet know how much.

"I like his vision," McAleer said. "I want to be part of that."

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