

# the Lamplighter

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## 'The Human Side of School Change'

The title of the book, The Human Side of School Change, written by Wellesley-based school organizational consultant Dr. Rob Evans, aptly describes what has been happening in our schools lately. As our student body and our school buildings have grown by 50% over the last decade...as 40% of our teaching staff have been newly hired in the last five years...and this year, as four of our seven school principals retire, we are experiencing the human side of school change. As Dr. Evans describes in his book, significant change requires planning, process, and involvement by all the stakeholders. As Steve Donovan, Marcia FitzGerald, Walter McGrail, and Sandra Wilensky plan for their futures beyond Acton and Acton-Boxborough, it is appropriate for us to look back at their contributions, and to look forward to our planning for successful transitions in each of our schools.

Steve Donovan, ABRHS

Steve Donovan came to the Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools as a counselor in 1972. Even at a young age his leadership skills were evident, and in 1976 Steve was named the K-12 counseling chairperson. He went on to become the head of Pupil Services in 1984, and in 1991 he became the principal of the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

In his 17 years as principal of ABRHS, the high school has undergone significant change. In that time, the high school has grown from 1400 students to almost 2000 students. Steve led the school community through a three-year building expansion and renovation without missing a single day of classes. Steve is an "out-of-the-box" thinker with remarkable problem-solving skills. Steve has led ABRHS in a way that prepares nearly 500 graduates each year for a future of endless opportunities.

Marcia FitzGerald, McCarthy-Towne School

Marcia FitzGerald taught for 25 years at the McCarthy-Towne School. In those years, over 600 children were affected by Marcia's warmth and care. When she started, McCarthy-Towne was a new, innovative elementary school with an arts-based curriculum. McCarthy-Towne has flourished with this model, and Marcia grew from a successful classroom teacher to succeed Parker Damon as principal of McCarthy-Towne in 2001. For the last seven years,

Marcia has continued the McCarthy-Towne tradition of developing exciting learning opportunities for children, while preparing them for their futures at R.J. Grey and ABRHS.

Walter McGrail, Gates School

Walter McGrail started as a teacher for the Acton Public Schools in 1970. He spent 30 years teaching 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades before becoming principal of the Gates School in 2001. Walter actually taught in four different elementary schools in Acton. Walter has always been willing to do what is needed, including teaching his Merriam 6<sup>th</sup> grade class at Conant for one year. He taught several years at the original Merriam School and the Douglas School before moving to Gates in 1983. Walter taught 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Gates until he became principal in 2001. In Walter's six years as principal, he has hired 16 out of the 21 classroom teachers, who will carry the strong Gates tradition forward for a generation of new students.

Sandra Wilensky, Merriam School

Sandra Wilensky started her career in Acton as a teacher at the Douglas School in 1983. In the early 1990s, when school enrollment was on the rise, plans were being made to re-open the Merriam School. This provided an exciting opportunity to explore teaching and learning styles, and to develop a new school philosophy within the Acton Public Schools. Sandra was one of a core group of teachers (some of whom are still at Merriam) who worked to develop the program for the new Merriam School. In 1993, Sandra moved from Douglas to Merriam, and in 1995 she was appointed principal. Under Sandra's leadership, Merriam has grown to be Acton's largest elementary school, serving 550 students with a project-based curriculum.

Thank You

As you can see from looking at four of our seven principals, Acton and Acton-Boxborough have had the good fortune of strong leadership for many years. Combined, Steve, Marcia, Walter, and Sandra have given over 130 years of leadership to the students of Acton and Boxborough. The number of students whose lives have been touched by these four individuals would be too many to count. We wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

*(cont. on next page)*

## 'Human Side of School Change' (cont.)

### Looking to the Future

As we plan for these transitions, we need to be sure to hire the highest quality individuals to take on the role of principal at ABRHS, McCarthy-Towne, Gates, and Merriam. We have looked at each school individually and developed the following processes to fill these important roles.

#### At ABRHS...

The search process for ABRHS began with the formation of a committee over the summer. The committee is made up of high school staff members, parents, community members and students. To gather input, committee members held staff, student and community forums. From this, a job description and an advertisement were developed. The advertisement was placed in the Boston Globe and Education Week in early November, with a deadline for submissions of December 6<sup>th</sup>. The committee will review all applications, and candidates will be interviewed in early January. Questions for the candidates are being developed with additional input from the community. Through the interview process, the committee is charged with selecting four finalists to recommend to the Superintendent. Once the finalists are determined, they will visit AB, and some members of the Acton-Boxborough community will visit the sites of the finalists. We hope to appoint the next principal of ABRHS in February or early March.

#### At McCarthy-Towne...

After a process of meeting with the McCarthy-Towne faculty, the Superintendent has decided to hire a one-year interim principal for McCarthy-Towne. A full search for a permanent principal will be held next year. The McCarthy-Towne interim principal position was posted in early November. After reviewing applications and holding interviews, Superintendent Ryan has offered the position to long-time McCarthy-Towne teacher, Susan Silberberg, who has all the qualifications and experience that the school community would like to see in their principal. Susan will work with Marcia FitzGerald to transition in the spring and will assume her official duties on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. She will hold the position for one year, while a search committee is formed and a formal search process seeks the long-term principal for McCarthy-Towne. We wish Susan the best in her new role.

#### At Gates...

A search committee is being formed to begin the process of searching for the next Gates School principal. The committee will be made up of faculty, staff, parents, and a district administrator. The position will be advertised in January, and interviews will be held in February. We hope to make an appointment in late March. The new principal will be able to work with Walter in the spring before officially starting at the end of June.

#### At Merriam...

The search committee, made up of teachers, parents, and Douglas Principal Chris Whitbeck, was formed in November. The process at Merriam will be similar to the high school process. Committee members have already scheduled time to gather input at a PTO meeting, a staff meeting and a public forum. Electronic means of reaching out to the community are also being explored. The position will be advertised in December/early January. The deadline for applications will be January 18<sup>th</sup>, and interviews will be held in late January/early February. The committee will recommend four finalists to the Superintendent. The finalists will visit Merriam, and a group from Acton will visit their schools. Our hope is to make an appointment in March.

- Marie Altieri  
Director of Personnel

## Report on the Class of 2007

The ABRHS Class of 2007 was composed of 432 members, 426 (98%) of whom planned to pursue post-secondary education. Of the 426 students, 91% enrolled in 4-year schools, while 7% continued their education at 2-year colleges, prep and technical schools. Seniors filed 2,977 college applications to 412 schools for an average of 7.5 per student (not including early decision applications). Many students (57% of those applying) are taking advantage of early application procedures. Our graduates are attending schools in 32 states, Washington D.C., Canada, England or Ireland. Forty percent remained in Massachusetts, and 60% stayed in New England. Seniors chose private institutions (58%) more often than public universities (42%). Our graduates continue to enjoy a high college acceptance rate. Of the total applications filed, 57% resulted in acceptance. The overall acceptance at New England state universities was 66%.

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