

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
36 Charter Road, Acton, Massachusetts 01720

Together we promote respect for self, others, and learning.

Alixé Callen, Ed.D.
PRINCIPAL

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

August 2011

Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to the 2011-2012 school year! I hope that you are enjoying a relaxing and fun-filled summer. While I am sure many of our students have had interesting work and educational experiences, I do hope that they all come back rested and ready for another exciting year.

We here at the high school have been working hard to prepare for the students' return. There are lots of wonderful things on tap for this year and we are excited to get going.

As was the case last year, the first day of school (August 30th) will be dedicated to freshman orientation, with only freshman students reporting to school. We received a very positive response when we initiated this program last year and look forward to providing this year's incoming students with the same comprehensive introduction to the school. Upperclassmen should report to school the following day (August 31st).

We also want to make sure that our incoming parents feel supported and well-oriented to life at the high school. Accordingly, we will host a new parent orientation (for the parents/guardians of incoming 9th graders and other new students) at 7:00 on September 7th in the auditorium. We hope that you will be able to join us.

Many of our past initiatives will continue this year. The issue of student stress continues to be paramount in my mind. Thanks to the hard work of our faculty committee on stress management, we have made a number of changes over the past few years. Among other things, we have revised the course selection and override process, made time management tools available to students, revised our mid-year exam schedule, provided a stress-relief space in the nurse's office, introduced a test postponement policy, provided yoga instruction through our PE classes, and introduced our freshmen-only orientation day. This year our approach will be slightly different. Our original faculty stress management committee has disbanded,

but we now have several other committees working on more specific initiatives. On a personal note, I remain concerned that stress is really a cultural issue here at the high school, as opposed to a structural one. The issue is one that we need to continue to tackle as an entire school community – educators, parents and students – looking at our own beliefs and actions to see how they contribute to student stress. As has been past practice, we will provide opportunities for members of the community to come together to talk about this important issue. In addition to the various parent forums and meetings, our book group focused on adolescent stress will continue, with various faculty members taking turns facilitating. Our first read will be *I'm Going to College – Not You: Surviving the College Search with Your Child*, by Jennifer Delahunty. Jen Gabel, a member of our counseling department, will facilitate the discussion, which will be scheduled for an evening in the early fall.

We have another exciting initiative that we will be introducing this year. We have recently joined forces with Google to provide our students with a school-based email account as well as access to the various tools Google offers. This initiative will allow us to provide students with more focused instruction in the area of technology and will allow for better communication between students and their teachers. Students will learn more on the first day of school.

The rest of this letter contains lots of practical information about the start of school. As we progress through the year, I will continue to be in touch via e-mail when issues and topics come up that I feel are important to share with you. I do not send a regularly timed message, choosing instead to be in touch as relevant topics arise. Please note, however, that the PTSO sends out a “Weekly Chatter” every Sunday morning, which contains up-to-date information about our calendar, events, and school policies. Please make sure to note your preferences concerning email communication on the School/PTSO Permission page on the PowerSchool Parent Portal.

Start of School

This year school begins for freshmen with a whole day (7:23-2:18) on Tuesday, August 30th. As this is the official opening day for the district, buses will run and lunch will be served (students planning to buy lunch should bring money). Students in grades 10-12 will report on Wednesday, August 31st. We will begin the day on August 31st with homeroom (noted on student schedules), to which all students should report by 7:23.

Staffing Changes

In addition to some wonderfully talented new teachers who will be joining our faculty this fall, we have a few changes on the leadership level.

Todd Chicko will be taking over as the Department Leader in Counseling. Todd has been here at AB for a number of years and is beloved by students. We are excited that he will be taken on this leadership role. We also thank Stephen Hitzrot for his strong work in this role over the past few years.

Steve Desy, our Athletic Director, will unfortunately be out of school for some time this fall. Kim Landry and Rick Kilpatrick, our Assistant Athletic Directors, have thankfully agreed to step in and fulfill Steve's responsibilities while he is out.

Our Department Leader for Alternative Programs, Kate Hermon, will be taking a leave for the year. We are delighted that Beth Baker, our Academic Support Center teacher, has agreed to take on this leadership role in Kate's stead.

Student Schedules

Student schedules will be available online through the PowerSchool Parent Portal on Monday, August 1st at 12:00 noon. In order to access a student's schedule, parents/guardians will need to complete their child's Emergency Information and School/PTSO permission pages. Please note that due to a recent upgrade of PowerSchool, some of our testers have reported some difficulties associated with using Internet Explorer as a browser. We recommend that you instead use Safari, Firefox, or Google Chrome.

Most schedules contain information regarding lockers. Please do not be concerned if a student's schedule is lacking this information. If that is the case, we will provide that information to the student on the first day of school. Seniors who do not plan to use their lockers for the 2011-2012 school year should see Mrs. Haras in room 117N or Mrs. DeRome in the Administration Office over the summer or at the beginning of the school year.

While we have put much work and thought into student schedules and are confident that they will be well received by students and families, we know from experience that some of you will have concerns. Because we have limited staff available in the summer, please use the following procedures if you have questions or concerns.

At this time, we will no longer accept requests for level changes to a higher-level course. If there are extenuating circumstances, students should contact the department leader. Such requests will not be otherwise entertained.

For those students with other scheduling issues, we are introducing a new process which we believe will allow us to provide much better support to students. Should a student find an error in their schedule, wish to add or drop a non-leveled elective, or need to schedule a meeting with the Appeals Board on Tuesday, August 23rd (for consideration of a schedule shift or teacher change), please click on the following link:

<http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/summerhours.shtml>.

There is a link embedded on that page which contains an electronic form for scheduling concerns. Students should follow the instructions on this form and submit their requests to the Counseling Center.

Any students with serious concerns who are unable to make it to Appeals Day (August 23rd) should send (or hand-deliver to the Counseling Center) a letter outlining their concerns. The letter should be addressed to the Appeals Board c/o Mr. Larry Dorey Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, 36 Charter Road, Acton, MA 01720. Letters of Appeal should not be sent by email. The deadline to submit a letter of appeal is Wednesday, August 17th.

As students are reviewing their schedules, please note that all students must be scheduled for a lunch period each day; lunch is served periods 4, 5, 6, and 7. All students will receive an updated schedule in homeroom on the first day of school.

Emergency Contact Information via PowerSchool Parent Portal

In order to access your student's schedule, parents will first need to take the time to go on line to complete or edit your student's emergency contact information on the PowerSchool Parent Portal. This log-in information was listed at the bottom of the letter that went out with the year end report cards. Once you have submitted the Emergency Information page and completed the PTSO/School Permission page, you will gain access to your student's schedule. You may continue to use PowerSchool to track your child's attendance and stored historical grades throughout the school year. If you have any questions, please contact Jeanne Potter by email jpotter@mail.ab.mec.edu.

Bus Schedules

Bus schedules will be on our website in August and will also be published in *The Beacon* in late August.

Fall Sports and Activities

Most fall sports practices will begin on August 25th with football beginning on August 22nd. Please check our website: <http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/> for the starting time for each sport. Students trying out for a team must have proof (green form) of a current physical examination on file with the nurses before tryouts. The athletic fee is \$205 per sport per season with an \$820 family cap. Waivers are available for cases of financial hardship.

Band camp begins August 15th (Monday-Thursday, 9:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.; Friday, August 19th 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). *Chorus camp* will be held on Tuesday, August 23rd 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Student IDs/School Pictures

Student pictures will be taken on Thursday, September 1st and Tuesday, September 6th. Students will be assigned to one of the two photo days by English class. Every student will be provided with an ID card. In addition, families may choose to purchase packages of these photographs. Parents will receive information in the mail from the photography company regarding picture ordering procedures. If you have any questions, the phone number for Prestige Portraits is (800) 426-9533.

Senior Portraits

To have a senior picture included in the yearbook, each student must have his/her senior portrait taken by Lifetouch Studio. Lifetouch will be on campus August 8th – August 12th and October 17th – October 21st. Families with questions about portrait appointments should wait to receive the postcard from Lifetouch which will include the contact information.

Senior Privileges

Seniors who have not yet applied for privileges and wish to do so may pick up application forms from the Main Office beginning the week of August 22nd. Completed forms should be returned to the appropriate Assistant Principal (Mr. Dorey, Mrs. Atwater-Rhodes or Mr. Marcotte). After the application is processed, students will be scheduled for a meeting with Dr. Callen, who will provide final approval for all privilege requests. If you have any questions about privileges, please contact Lani DeRome in the administration office (lderome@mail.ab.mec.edu).

Parking

Parking on campus will be available for seniors only, at a cost of \$200 for the year. The first day to purchase parking stickers is Tuesday, August 30th (freshman orientation day) between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Stickers will be sold in Room 201 (by the upper gymnasium entrance). If you wish to begin this process over the summer, you may pick up a parent sign off/registration card from Lani DeRome in the administration office (147S) any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Parking stickers can also be purchased during school hours after school starts. Any incoming senior who owes a parking fine from junior year will not be issued a parking sticker until the fine is paid.

Juniors are still welcome to park in the last row of the junior high lot or in the back lot of KMart. During school hours parents and visitors are welcome to park in the designated visitor parking spaces at the high school. Please do not park in any numbered parking space as all of these spaces have been assigned to faculty and staff. The high school campus has specific drop off and pick up areas for parents, students and buses and the direction of traffic flow changes in the morning and the afternoon. We ask that all visitors please follow the direction of the high school campus monitors. The campus monitors are available to answer your questions and direct you through our campus.

Absences

Parents are to notify the Main Office of all student absences. Please call (978-264-3323) on the day of the absence. If parent notification is not received, the absence will be recorded as unexcused. An unexcused absence will be defined as a truancy. Details pertaining to consequences for student truancy will be discussed with students in homeroom on the first day of school. As was the case last year, parents can review their child's daily attendance records on the PowerSchool Parent Portal. In order to receive access, you will be required to update your child's emergency

contact information and the PTSO permissions first. In accordance with school policy, each student is granted an opportunity to earn full credit for any course as long as his/her total absences (excused and unexcused) do not exceed 20 days per full year course, 10 days per semester course, or 5 days per semester course meeting on alternate days.

Dismissals

If a student needs to be released early, he/she must bring a note signed by a parent or legal guardian to the Main Office prior to third period on the day of the dismissal. In the event of an absolute emergency, parents may call the Main Office to have their child dismissed on that day. Students returning to school must check in at the Main Office when they arrive. Students leaving campus without following the proper dismissal procedures will be considered truant from any class missed. Notes excusing trancies due to the student's failure to follow the dismissal policy will not be accepted. Upperclassmen with privileges are expected to follow the same dismissal procedures whenever they are going to miss class.

Parents: If you have an emergency during the school day and need to contact your son or daughter, please call the Counseling Center at **978-264-4700 ext. 3430** or leave the message in person at the school store (located right next to the Main Office). Messages will be delivered to students in classrooms by our A-B Express student delivery service during selected periods during the day.

I know this letter contains a lot of information. We do not expect you to remember everything! Please note that all of the information contained here is available on our school website: <http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/>. Links are also provided to both the PTSO and the Counseling Department websites. We encourage you to check all of those sites regularly for information about school happenings, upcoming events, school policies, etc.

Again, I hope that you are enjoying your summer. We look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alixe Callen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Alixe Callen, Ed.D.