



October, 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we become continuously more focused on student health and safety, reducing stress and promoting the sense of well-being in our Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools, building partnerships and enhancing communication continue to be paramount to our organization's effectiveness.

Our school district believes that outstanding internal and external connectedness is key in facilitating information before we face challenges or even a crisis. Utilizing our teams and partnerships with our community ensures a safe environment for our children and our students. These resources offer information, refuge, and healing for families and children.

Experts in violence and substance abuse prevention agree that simply passing on facts about the dangers of alcohol, illegal drugs, or other risky behavior (bullying, cyber bullying, etc.) will not necessarily change behavior. Behavioral change is the result of changes in attitudes and beliefs; these changes take discussion, peer and adult modeling, self-awareness, internal goal setting, and positive reinforcement – to mention a few characteristics.

We were particularly proud this month to be partners with our Acton-Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth (ABCHY), our Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpEd PAC), and the No Room for Hate Committee in our first annual Youth Advocacy Community Symposium. This symposium provided a forum where our young people, parents, school and town leaders and community members identified the supports, opportunities, places and space, and services to help all young people develop and thrive. Dr. Stephen Mills, our newly appointed Superintendent shared his vision for collaboration and a commitment for schools and communities to work together. Joining him for a panel discussion were students from the Acton-Boxborough Student Council, and Bruce Oetinger, School to Work Coordinator.

On a personal note, I immensely appreciated the time that everyone gave to this important topic and am cognizant that everyone who attended came with a shared common purpose ~ a sense of responsibility and obligation to our children and to the community at large. Many businesses and organizations were represented; all who attended made equally important contributions by collaborating and brainstorming potential resources in the community.

Moreover, growing up is hard to do! Families want their children to grow up in an environment in which they become independent, make good choices, now and in the future, but in an environment in which knowing that one can make mistakes and fail, pick up the pieces constructively, learn from the mistakes, and grow from the experience. This is called resiliency – an essential element for becoming an independent young adult - and on this journey, the family is a support and in many cases, a refuge.

In schools, we want our students to be critical and self-learners; we want independent and analytical thinkers. We offer support in their thinking; we redirect, when necessary. For our students, we want them to continuously grow with intact self and body images, an inquisitive mind, a thirst for life long learning and with a duty for citizenship. But we know too well, that sometimes, youngsters block this natural learning and anticipated but expected steps in development; dependency, failure to think independently and critically, and sometimes holding secrets work against these developmental stages and create their own lifetime challenges. That's where homes and schools can help – as a refuge, as a guide, as a listening ear, as a healer.

When the home, community, and schools work together, these interdependent organizations help further and assist significantly. Creating positive environments for students in their homes, in schools, and in the community assists in learning new strategies for self-development, solid social and academic learning, and committed and dutiful citizenship, now and in adulthood. These positive and interdependent networks of school, home, community will become the long lasting landscape for our next generation.

Our goal is not to focus only on treatment post incident, but also to develop strategies for reducing unacceptable social behavior and enhancing student safety. That said, as child advocates, we know that the realities often require an immediate response. What do we need to know?

Emergency Preparedness

Did you know that all of our schools have developed and practiced emergency response plans -- well articulated and clearly understood by all? We hold drills that include police and fire personnel as the best approach to emergencies in effective collaboration between agencies. All schools have voluntary crisis intervention teams, led by building principals, that respond to both state and national emergencies, unexpected loss or tragedy within the community, and more.

51A Mandated Reporting

You may or may not be aware that all school-based staff participants, as mandated reporters, are trained annually for the legal responsibilities for reporting alleged child abuse and neglect. Topics covered include: the Mandated Reporter statute, the reporting process, recognizing indicators of child abuse and neglect, the role of the Department of Children and Family Services, and the support of school counselors and psychologists in each school. As reporters, we must report what was said, told, or observed; we do not make judgments. Investigations are done by the Department of Children and Families to substantiate or not to substantiate what has been reported.

Connectedness with Pupil Services

The schools have designed instructional programs for our students to best equip them for the many years of future learning. As part of this paradigm, classroom teachers and staff are available to students to enhance the learning process. Specialized programs assist the unique needs of students in many areas of learning, socialization, and behavior. Behind all these programs, major supports for families and students are the specialists, counselors, school psychologists, and nurses connected to all our schools. These trained professionals help families and students to sort out all types of situations in a confidential and safe way.

Final Thoughts

Children come into their school communities with diverse histories and experiences and our school community serves a critical function in addressing the diverse needs of our young people. Utilizing our teams and partnerships with continuous strong communication goes a long way to keep our children and students safe.

Sincerely,

Liza Huber

Director of Pupil Services



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Co-Chair: Bill Guthlein (978) 263-0610 guthw@aol.com

AB SpEd PAC Website <http://www.abspedpac.org>

For Your Information
School and Community Based Resources

Support for Families and Child Advocacy	
<p>Acton-Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth (ABCHY) <i>Specific Contact: Jan Stewart</i> 978-844-4588 abcforhealthyyouth@yahoo.com</p>	<p>Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Resource Officers <i>Specific Contacts: Jim Goodemote, Keith Campbell & Dan Silva</i> 978-264-9638</p>
<p>Acton-Boxborough United Way <i>Specific Contacts: Carolyn Randolph and Shelley Sherman</i> 8 Whittier Dr. Acton, MA 01720</p>	<p>Acton-Boxborough United Way PO Box 2258 Acton, MA 978-263-1777</p>
<p>Acton Community Services <i>Specific Contact: Laura Ducharme</i> 978-264-9653 lducharme@acton-ma.gov</p>	<p>Community Alliance for Youth (CAFY) <i>Specific Contact: Bob McGowan</i> 169 Main Street Acton, MA 01720</p>
<p>Danny's Place for Youth <i>Specific Contact: Cindy McCarthy</i> 16 Vineyard Reach Mashpee, MA 02649</p>	<p>Department of Children and Families <i>Framingham Area Office</i> 63 Fountain Street Framingham, MA 508-424-0100</p>
<p>Acton Public Schools <i>Counseling Chair: Ginny Conway</i> 978-264-4700, ext. 3762 Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools <i>Counseling Chair: Stephen Hitzrot</i> 978-264-4700, ext. 3430</p>	<p>Domestic Violence Victim Assistance Program 978-318-3421 www.dvvap.org</p>
<p>Child-at-Risk Hotline 1-800-792-5200 Parental Stress Line 800-632-8188</p>	<p>Acton Medical Associates <i>School Physicians: Chris Cooper & Jessica Rubinstein</i> 978-263-1131</p>

For Your Information
School and Community Based Resources

Intervention Programs for Children and Young Adults	
<p>Boundaries Therapy Center <i>518 Great Road</i> <i>Acton, MA</i> <i>978-263-4878</i></p>	<p>CBC Fitness and Wellness Center <i>Specific Contact: Armand Chery</i> <i>525 Main Street</i> <i>Acton, MA</i></p>
<p>Department of Developmental Services (formerly Department of Mental Retardation) <i>One Ashburton Place</i> <i>Boston, MA 02108</i> <i>617-572-1600</i></p>	<p>Department of Mental Health <i>25 Stanfield Street</i> <i>Boston, MA</i> <i>617-626-8000</i></p>
<p>Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission <i>27 Wormwood Street</i> <i>Boston, MA 02210</i> <i>800-245-6543</i></p>	<p>Recreation Department <i>Specific Contact: Cathy Fochtman</i> <i>472 Main Street</i> <i>Acton, MA</i></p>
<p>Disabled Persons Protection Hotline <i>800-426-9009</i></p>	<p>Elliot Community Human Services <i>111 ORNAC</i> <i>Concord, MA</i></p>