

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

**EDUCATION REPORT
September 2007 – August 2008**

Introduction

The 2007-2008 school year once again witnessed a myriad of activities that added to the learning experiences of all our students. As an educational community committed to excellence in all our endeavors, the Acton Public Schools and Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools continued to develop, research, and further enhance our curricular and instructional skills and course offerings. With a culture that believes in supporting all learners, we are proud of our accomplishments over the past year and anticipate that even greater successes lie ahead.

Enrollment

The October 1, 2007 elementary enrollment was relatively flat with 2,598 students (including 27 special education students attending “out-of-district” schools). This was a decrease of five students from the previous October 1. Kindergarten enrollment decreased by seventeen students, from 311 to 294. There were no school choice students at the elementary level, although sixteen were children of out of town staff members.

The junior high school enrollment for October 1 decreased by 25 students, from 1011 to 986, with no school choice students remaining. Of this number, six were children of out of town staff members, and 23 were special education students attending out-of-district schools.

The high school enrollment increased from 1,930 to 2,010, a difference of 80 students, or 4%. This is the largest number of students ever to attend Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. There were 71 school choice students at the high school – a decrease of six students from the previous year. Of the total number enrolled, 48 were special education students attending “out-of-district” schools.

Personnel

Staffing changes for the 2007-08 school year were affected by the June 2007 retirement of five Acton Public and two Acton-Boxborough Regional teachers. Leaves of absence for five ABRSD teachers and twelve APS teachers were granted, and twelve APS and eight AB resignations were received. The 23.4 ABRSD and 13 APS full-time equivalent new teachers who were hired filled these vacancies and additional openings.

Curriculum and Instruction

The best gift that schools can give society is learners who find the idea of being proactive, powerful learners not only feasible and imaginable but also tremendously appealing. The Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Districts are committed to providing each student with a K-12 educational experience that will prepare them to be such adults.

Our students are facing a future that will require them to embrace and adapt to many new opportunities and challenges. Some of these opportunities and challenges they will inherit from the world we leave them and others will emerge as the world changes. What does this mean for schools?

It means that we need schools that are thinking centered – schools that focus not just on content, skills and testing results, but on schooling minds. At Acton and Acton-Boxborough, we believe that every student should become metacognitive about learning, develop creative critical-thinking skills, learn for understanding, and be prepared to apply their knowledge and understanding to solve the problems of the present and the future.

Our teachers and administrators are dedicated to the challenging work of designing a 21st-century curriculum and facilitating this curriculum with impacting, research-based instruction. The information in this report will provide you with the background knowledge and current information on the status of our work in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

In the elementary schools . . .

- At the grade level meetings this year, teachers:
 - ~ Learned questioning strategies that were applicable to a variety of disciplines.
 - ~ Discussed the importance of reconnecting children to nature.
 - ~ Explored digital storytelling in order to share and document learning.
 - ~ Learned how to use the district library cataloging system “Destiny.”
 - ~ Reviewed nutritional data and educational materials from the USDA.
- A mathematics assessment strategy was piloted in kindergarten classes and also with primary Special Educators.
- Schools were immersed in literacy initiatives and mathematics program adoptions/reviews.
- We continued to integrate subjects and topics (especially mathematics, anatomy, physiology, geography, art and music) in physical education classes.
- We also continued using Fitnessgram assessments to gauge and promote fitness.
- Conant School received a Community Preservation Act Grant that will afford them an opportunity to develop nature trails on school property. These trails will be accessible to the community.

English Language Arts . . .

At the junior high, teachers:

- Identified and implemented activities and rubrics for the 6 Traits of Writing.

At the high school

- The Social Studies Department and the English Department prepared “ABRHS: Guide to Writing and Research.”
- Two semester-long writing electives were developed for next year: Creative Writing and Writing Workshop.

Mathematics . . .

At the junior high, teachers:

- Reviewed the 8th-grade Honors curriculum to ensure consistency in scope and depth.
- Aligned the new 7th-grade text with the 7th-grade mathematics curriculum.

At the high school, teachers:

- Analyzed the grade 10 Mathematics MCAS exam to ensure coverage of all content needed in Geometry.

Science . . .

At the junior high, teachers:

- Investigated ways to improve student content reading.
- Developed a global warming awareness program for the RJ Grey community.

At the high school, teachers:

- Implemented five new courses: Forensics, Bioethics Online, Astronomy, Fundamentals of Science and Physical Science.
- Began developing two new courses for next year: Engineering Principles and Oceanography/Marine Biology.

Social Studies/History . . .

At the junior high, teachers:

- Piloted a new unit on India in grade 8.
- Incorporated a geography unit in grade 7.

At the high school:

- Teachers worked collaboratively to prepare for the American History MCAS for juniors in 2011, focusing on the content and structure of questions, plus future review strategies.
- The Social Studies Department collaborated with the English Department to prepare A Guide to Writing and Research.

World Languages . . .

At the junior high:

- The new French program was implemented in grade 7, with plans for it to be introduced in grade 8 next year.
- Being ‘on team’ has afforded additional cultural experiences.

At the high school, teachers:

- Finalized the listening and reading departmental rubrics.
- Planned and supported a June Latin trip to Rome in a continued effort to address global education.

Physical Education and Health . . .

At the high school, teachers:

- Administered the High Five Program and Physical Education Field Trip.
- Held a very successful Health and Physical Education Awareness Day.

Technology /Engineering . . .

At the junior high, teachers:

- Further implemented the Massachusetts Engineering Education Standards by balancing the depth and amount of instruction.

Computer Literacy

At the junior high

- A new interactive website was created, linking students’ projects to the site for easy viewing.

Library /Media . . .

At grades 7-12, teachers:

- Continued to develop a plan for our libraries that incorporates state/national standards and expectations.
- Evaluated the April 2008 Massachusetts Technology Literacy Standards and Expectations for inclusion in the development and application of an integrated library information skills curriculum.

Districtwide Initiatives, K-12

Professional Development

- Over 65 K-12 teachers attended 6 Trait Writing workshops throughout the year.
- More than 40 teachers attended Saturday workshops on differentiated instruction with an emphasis on early literacy and English language learners.
- Books, videos and DVDs continued to be added to the district Curriculum Library.

- Faculty and staff used the new on-line Professional Development website to register for a variety of offerings.
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment meetings were held in all curricular areas to review and update action plans and share MCAS analysis.

Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Instructional Technology and Information Technology

See the sections that address these topics in greater depth.

Parent Involvement Project (PIP) Programs

The Acton PIP continued to offer high-quality science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences for Acton Families. An Acton PIP event is curriculum-centered and “hands-on.” PIP supported the 4th-grade Star Party, which extends the fourth-grade unit of astronomy and provides students the opportunity to view the night sky through professional telescopes. For the second year in a row, Blanchard fourth graders and their parents were invited, resulting in almost 800 guests to the Annual Star Party! Other PIP events included the Sci-Tech Fest at the high school, the 3rd- and 5th-grade Market Math at Roche Brothers, and Family Domino Night.

School-Business Partnership Programs

We continue to expand our School-Business Partnerships Programs. Please visit our website at <http://ab.mec.edu/business/partners.shtml> for more information.

It's All About Learning . . .

In addition to our emphasis on academic excellence, it has become increasingly important in recent years for us as educators to incorporate 21st-century skills into our educational instruction. In order for us to successfully complete our districts’ mission of preparing students to be full participants in a global learning community, we need to emphasize collaboration, communication, innovation, creativity and problem solving throughout the K-12 curriculum. Whether working with a partner in a high school chemistry lab or reading with a book buddy in the elementary school, students are practicing 21st-century skills throughout their educational careers at Acton and Acton-Boxborough.

It is an honor to work for a community that is dedicated to continuously improving the educational program. Your continued support of our districts is valued and appreciated.

“Learning together creates new ideas that bring inspiration
to our work with students.”

Susan Horn, Assistant Superintendent

Acton Public Schools

The five elementary schools – Conant, Douglas, Gates, McCarthy-Towne, and Merriam – have the following in common.

- Each has a School Council, as required by the Educational Reform Act of 1993.
- Vital parent involvement plays an active role in the life of each school. These parents sponsored numerous assembly programs that enriched their school's cultural and aesthetic life with musicians, storytellers, and other performers. They raised funds for schoolwide projects; provided volunteers for many in- and out-of-class activities, tasks and services; staffed the “Safe Arrival” hotlines; and also sponsored school newsletters and other activities.
- A number of whole-school events, such as orientation programs for kindergarten parents and children as the school year begins, back-to-school-night open houses in the fall, and a Memorial Day Program in the spring, take place.
- Students use computers, technology, associated software, and the Internet in various ways: to supplement the writing/composing process, to enrich or extend learning experiences in each curricular area, to strengthen the learning of concepts and practice of skills via the Internet.
- The faculty participates in professional development through one or more of these activities: pursuit of formal course work, involvement in systemwide curriculum and instruction review and improvement projects, participation in the districtwide Professional Development Day, and attendance at professional conferences and workshops. In addition, many teachers work with student teachers. Through their actions, every year the faculty shows that they are truly committed to the concept of being life-long learners.
- Each school has a reception or event to celebrate and honor the parents and volunteers who assist them during the school year.

In September 2007 Conant School welcomed Christine Price as its new principal.

Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools

R. J. Grey Junior High School

R. J. Grey began the 2007-2008 school year with 961 students: 485 in the seventh grade and 476 in the eighth grade based on October 1 data. This was a decrease of 21 students compared to the 990 enrollment reported for October 1, 2006. As school began, the administrative team (Principal Craig Hardimon, Assistant Principal Allison Warren, and interim Assistant Principal Jack Hughes) welcomed new seventh graders and returning eighth graders to R. J. Grey.

To ensure a positive transition to the start of the school year for both 7th and 8th graders, an “Opening Days of School” Feedback Form was distributed on Parent’s Night. In this regard, survey results were overwhelmingly positive, with students feeling comfortable and supported. Parents felt included and well informed. It was an outstanding start to the school year.

Teaming is the fundamental core of RJG. The team model allows us to create a strong web of support to enhance student success. A large school becomes a smaller school. With consistent communication built-in among team teachers, there are fewer cracks for students to fall through. Issues are addressed early, and students have an opportunity to develop close relationships with their teachers, as well as with a familiar peer group. Teaming is the ideal format through which we can deliver those programs and values we most believe in, as expressed in our Statement of Purpose; e.g., meeting the needs of the adolescent, maintaining curricular quality and interdisciplinary opportunities, and creating a sense of community.

During the 2007-2008 school year, there were four teams in both seventh and eighth grades. Each seventh-grade team had approximately 121 students and five teachers (English, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Spanish and/or French). In grade eight, each team averaged 119 students and five teachers (Math, Science, English, Social Studies, and Spanish and/or French). On an ongoing basis, teachers planned integrated curricular activities, which helped students see the relationships between various subjects.

All students take English, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Physical Education/Health. The curriculum demonstrates the core values of reading (the English program is literature-based), writing (although skills are primarily taught in English classes, the other academic subjects have adopted the “Writing Across the Curriculum” approach, which provides students with a more consistent writing approach), math (with the added skill development of reading mathematical language), and our physical (Science) and cultural (Social Studies) world. Most of our students take a world language, with twice as many taking Spanish as French. Seventh graders participate in an “exploratory program” that consists of Study Skills, Art, Music and Minuteman Technology Lab I, each of which meets every other day for half the year. Exploratory courses for the eighth graders are Art, Minuteman Technology Lab II, Life Skills/Health, Drama and Study Skills Technology; these classes last for one-fifth of the year.

In addition to the core curriculum, students elect to participate in band, chorus or Grey-block. Grey-block is a combination of curriculum-related mini-courses and structured study halls with team teachers.

In October 2007, R. J. Grey (as well as the high school and elementary schools) received the results of the state-mandated MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) tests from the previous spring. We continue to be proud that our students’ scores compared favorably with the top-performing schools in the state. This is a result of the high quality of teachers and teaching, an excellent curriculum, fine students, and the supportive families who make education a priority for their children.

Learning and connecting with members of the R. J. Grey community took place for many students through our extracurricular activities. The interscholastic athletic program included teams in cross country, soccer, field hockey, basketball, softball, track, and baseball. All participants on these teams paid an activity fee, which helped to support these programs. The intramural program was available to all students, meeting either before or after school. These intramurals included basketball, lacrosse, strength training, and Club 107, a running group to prepare students to run in Boston before the marathon. Other after-school activities included Adopt-a-Grandparent, Jazz Band, Garage Band, Speech and Debate Team, Chess/Board Games Club, Math Counts, Science Olympiad, the Yearbook and the AB Blueprint (the school literary

publication). The school musical, “High School Musical,” involved over 150 students and 200 parents. We continued the tradition of the Rotunda Project, where each student created a small, self-representative piece of art. These individual squares were then hung in the rotunda area on poster-board painted the color of each team.

Through the involvement of the Student Council, students connect with each other in a number of ways. This group helped to plan school-wide activities, dances, and service learning projects, and several Student Council members continued to serve on the Principal Student Advisory Board. In addition to our annual community service learning projects, such as the Coat Drive, Walk to the West Acton Food Pantry (the first year that all students participated), and collecting for Toys for Tots, the Student Council and teams found new programs to support. Among these were: a day of maintenance work on parks and conservation lands; Project Tammaa, which raised money and awareness for a number of international causes; and the participation of the entire student body in a change drive for the Make A Wish Foundation. In addition, our annual used-coat drive earned praise from Anton’s Cleaners for another outstanding year.

Special events during the school year included Halloween Dress-up Day, the Thanksgiving Assembly, Blue and Gold Day (school spirit day), World Language Week, a weekend day ski trip to Waterville Valley, the end-of-year seventh-grade trip to Kimball’s and eighth-grade day at Canobie Lake Park, and the Student Recognition Assembly.

In continuing our commitment to the partnership between school and home, daily emails, monthly articles and “drop in hours,” and weekly communication from the principal promoted continuity and educational support to families. Additionally, RJG professional staff offered parent forums to parents and guardians on adolescent development, homework, school discipline, and stress management. These were extremely well received. Of particular note was the number of 6th-grade parents who attended these discussion forums as part of their children’s transition to the junior high school. The School Council, consisting of four parents, one community-person-at-large, two staff members, and the principal, also addressed a wide variety of relevant issues and made recommendations to the administration that were very helpful. The School Council continued to have a strong voice in the development of the school and the overall school climate. An active P.T.S.O. organization (for families in grades seven through twelve) planned, organized, and assisted with many events at R. J. Grey. Parents/guardians were invited to attend monthly noontime informational meetings with both the RJG and ABRHS principals, who presented reports and answered questions. The P.T.S.O. also sponsored evening programs designed to provide information about the schools.

Another RJG highlight included our seventh annual Project Wellness Day. Project Wellness is a daylong conference for 7th-grade students and a parent, designed to help parents and teenagers recognize the variety of issues faced by today’s families and to develop, maintain or improve adult-teenager open communication. This event brought seventh-grade students and adult family members together at Merrimack College on March 17, 2008 to learn more and better ways to communicate with each other about difficult issues and sensitive topics, ranging from time management to drug use to relationships. Approximately 1,000 students, family members, and staff participated in this event.

As a follow-up to the 2006-2007 Self-Study, the R.J. Grey staff continued with initiatives that promoted learning, mutual respect, and opportunities for personal growth. In response to parent, staff, and student feedback, the 2007-2008 school year offered all constituents additional professional development and training opportunities for addressing incidents of bullying, teasing, and harassment. For staff, Professional Day in November 2007 offered the faculty systemic interventions and strategies for promoting a safe school, as well as practical strategies for responding to incidents of bullying, teasing and harassment. For students, the counseling department facilitated and coordinated classroom-wide sessions in the seventh grade, promoting respect for oneself and others and responding to harassment and bullying behavior. In general, the customized Self-Study was a meaningful process promoting dialogue across settings. The findings and recommendations will continue to guide the faculty and the administration in their commitment to providing the successful school experience that the community has come to expect.

At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, three veteran staff members, Judy McKendry, Annelise Roach and Janet Rodero, retired after many years of service to our school. These professionals devoted decades to our school community and touched the lives of several hundred students and families. We thank them for their many years of leadership, support, and dedication to the students of R. J. Grey Junior High.

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

Post Secondary Education: The ABRHS Class of 2008 was comprised of 469 students; of these, 95% enrolled at four-year schools, while 4% continued their education at two-year colleges, prep and technical schools.

Standardized Test Results: Average SAT scores for 2008 seniors again exceeded those of state and national populations. This is significant since 99% of AB students took the SATs, compared to the state average of 85% and the national average of 48%. Our average combined score for the SAT was 1840, which is 288 points higher than the average combined Massachusetts score of 1546.

National Merit Scholarship Competition: Thirteen members of the Class of 2008 achieved semi-finalist recognition; 58 others received letters of commendation.

National Honor Society: There were 105 members of the class of 2009 inducted into the NHS.

National World Language Honor Societies: In 2008, 41 students of Spanish qualified for membership in the local chapter of the National Spanish Honor Society, 35 students qualified for the National French Honor Society, and 10 students qualified for induction into the National Honor Society in Latin.

National, Regional, and State World Language Competitions: In 2008, seventy-six students placed both nationally and at the chapter level in the National French Examination. On the National Latin Exam, 58 students received gold medals and 23 received silver; eleven students received magna cum laude recognition, and eleven students received cum laude recognition. On the Italian exam, one student placed nationally and one student received honorable mention.

World Language Achievement Awards and Leadership Awards: Thirty-five students of Spanish, French, Latin and Italian were recipients of World Language Achievement Awards. Ariel Geist was the recipient of the Leadership Award; Louisa Paine received the Excellence in Spanish Award; Anne Dietterich received the Excellence in French Award; Nica Latto received the Excellence in Italian Award; and David Corwin received the Excellence in Latin Award.

Academic Decathlon Team: The team of nine regulars and twenty alternates won the Massachusetts State Championship for the 16th time in the past 17 years. A total of fifty Massachusetts high schools competed. In addition, the team placed 13th overall in the country.

Mathematics Team: In the 2007–2008 seasons, the team finished in third place in the Massachusetts Mathematics League and then tied for first place in New England among large schools at the New England Math League Competition in May 2008. Four students were finalists on the state Mathematics Olympiad examination: David Corwin, Feiqi Jiang, Ben Cohen and Mo Zhou. On the American Math Competition, three students advanced to the third level: David Corwin, Feiqi Jiang and Xiaoyu He.

Speech and Debate: The team was composed of over fifty students from grades 9-12. Competing in eighteen tournaments in a variety of events ranging from student congress to dramatic interpretation and poetry reading, team members prepared original pieces and scripted selections to be presented and judged at each event. Competing in the Massachusetts Catholic Forensic League, the team was matched against teams from schools across the state and consistently placed in the medal rounds. The debate team had a particularly strong showing in the Silver Lake Tournament, where it placed third overall in the team sweepstakes. The team's top competitors also competed on a national level in Las Vegas and at Harvard University.

Athletics: During the 2007-08 school year, participation in athletics remained consistent, with 1,750 students in grades 7-12. In the fall season, the girls' field hockey and soccer teams both captured Division 1 State Championships. In the spring our girls' tennis team also captured a Division 1 State Championship. The overall success of the athletic program was recently recognized by the Boston Globe, which awarded Acton-Boxborough Regional High School with the Dalton Award. This award is annually presented to the school with the highest winning percentage in the state.

Performing Arts: See the Performing Arts section for this information.

Proscenium Circus: See the Performing Arts section for this information.

Peer Leadership Program: Peer Leadership had another very successful year with a continued increase in membership of over thirty dedicated students. The peer leaders facilitated alcohol/drug awareness programs in Acton's elementary schools, led social development programs at R. J. Grey Junior High, chaperoned the sixth-grade social, and engaged in smoking awareness programs.

The School Newspaper: *The Spectrum*, published six times during the school year, includes articles and photography of interest to the ABRHS community. Its staff of approximately forty students works on all aspects of the paper, including writing, editing, photography, layout and copyediting.

Student Council: The primary student government group, consisting of 45+ students, elected representatives of their classes and also walk-on members. Student Council is responsible for organizing school-wide activities and fundraisers and for disbursing funds for improvement of the school facility on behalf of its students. They meet weekly on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. in the ABRHS Counseling Center.

“Window Seat”: Acton Boxborough’s Literary and Art Magazine and Creative Writing Club annually publishes two to three issues of student poetry, prose, lyrics, and art. Students do the writing, editing, design, layout, printing, assembling, and distribution of the magazine. Students write creatively every week to generate submissions for the magazine; the magazine welcomes and encourages students not participating in the club to submit their art and writing for publication. “Window Seat” students also work in conjunction with the Robert Creeley Foundation to host the annual Robert Creeley poetry reading and the Helen Creeley student poetry prize, a competition for student poets that awards the winning students a cash prize and the honor to be an opening reader for the Robert Creeley award-winning poet.

Idiosyncrasy: The high school topical magazine, *Idiosyncrasy*, began seven years ago when a group of enthusiastic students approached English teacher Dennis Kavanagh with the idea. Since then, the magazine has put out two to three issues per year. *Idiosyncrasy* is a thematic magazine that looks at social issues from different cultural perspectives. The magazine encourages and celebrates the diversity of our world and the people in it. *Idiosyncrasy* is composed of editorial and factual articles that are intended to educate and inspire readers. Students conduct research, analysis, and synthesis in order to produce each issue.

Harvard Model Congress: Ten juniors represented ABRHS at this four-day government simulation. The Acton League of Women Voters generously underwrote their participation. Those representing were Kaila Guilmet, Ankit Gupta, Valerie Michelman, Chris Southcott, Tina Sun, Diyang Tang and Meghan Venno.

Girls State: Two juniors, Haley Meidell and Thanmayi Rachapudi, attended with the support of the Maynard Emblem Club.

Boys State: For the first time ABRHS sent a delegate, Ben Coll, to the simulation.

Career Exploration Activities: Beginning in November, approximately 250 students made one-day job shadowing visits to a variety of work sites. This program owes its success to the support of the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce School Business Partnership Committee, which sponsored a Job Shadowing Kick-off Breakfast in November. At three Career Breakfasts during the year, career speakers talked to groups of students interested in their fields of work. Twenty-one members of the senior class completed three-week full-time internships at the end of the school year. Other career exploration activities included the Senior Seminar course, the Work Study program, and a website listing employment opportunities.

Senior Community Service Day: On May 2, the Class of 2008 spent the day working on volunteer projects in and around Acton and Boxborough. Before the seniors began their projects, they were served breakfast at the school by the faculty and administration. This was the fourteenth year that the senior class organized a Senior Community Service Day.

Community Service Activities: The school's "Accept the Challenge Program" encourages every student to become involved in some way in volunteer activities, either during the school year, during the summer, or both. The school held its eighth Community Service Awards Night on January 21, 2008; at this ceremony 500 students received recognition for their volunteer efforts.

Pupil Services

Parent outreach and communication within Pupil Services continues to be paramount. The monthly Communiqué, written by the Director of Pupil Services to all special education parents, continues to be a viable mechanism for communication. The SpEd PAC is offered regular opportunities to participate in this mailing; relevant topics, such as current information regarding student record policies, independent evaluations, and the budget, are addressed. At this time, the Pupil Services email database has grown to the point where the mailing is completed electronically; only 150 parents require a hard copy mailing at this time. The Pupil Services Lending Library also continues to grow as interest in current books and materials assist parents with deeper understanding of various disabilities and their impact on student learning. Pupil Services continues to appreciate the generosity of our parents who have contributed books to the library. The SpEd PAC and Pupil Services co-hosted their second annual Parent Workshop Day. Again, more than 140 parents were in attendance with enthusiastic feedback about the speakers.

Regarding our international families, efforts to increase the participation of our international families through activities such as the Fall Information Evening for Limited English Proficient (LEP) families is in place. This event provides families with housing, legal, and community supports.

The SpEd PAC established two task force groups: one focusing on transitional supports within the district, PK-K, 6-7, and 8-9, and the other focusing on a Parent/Guardian Handbook, which will provide parents with practical information regarding special education, including the regulations, home activities, friendship groups at home, summer camps, and other activities in and near the community.

It has been unnecessary for Pupil Services to establish a Task Force regarding district guidelines for determining a Specific Language Disability (SLD), since the Department of Education (DOE) has issued a relevant and practical training module in this regard. Training of staff has already taken place, and new guidelines and regulations are in place.

Because eligibility for special education continues to be a targeted area of concern for regular and special educators, principals are collaborating closely with the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and the Director of Pupil Services to better understand Response to Intervention (RTI) requirements and their application to regular education classrooms.

There has been tremendous commitment for promoting districtwide school safety initiatives. Pupil Services has been able, through grant funding, to support several building-based initiatives, including regular educator trainings in "Open Circle," "Second Step," and "First Response," and training junior high students at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) with Dr. Elizabeth Englander. Since each building has its unique culture, it has conducted its training

and discussions; i.e., customizing its application while at the same time keeping within the standards and goals set by the District. This approach empowers staff and administration to operate as a unit, planning and executing preventive and action-oriented approaches to school safety.

A special education fiscal task force was established to study the drivers of special education. The committee, including representatives from the school committee, selectmen, the finance committee, Pupil Services, and SpEd PAC, examined not only the probable causes for escalation of the special education budget but also the devised Pupil Services plan, which has decreased these costs. In the study of out-of-district placements, the R.J. Grey Connections program was established to meet the needs of students and offset the escalating costs.

In collaboration with the ABRHS Principal, the high school counseling department updated and enhanced registration procedures for welcoming new families to the district. These procedures have been thoughtfully articulated, and counselors have been trained.

In collaboration with the Technology Department, the district has identified SNAP as the electronic record-keeping system of choice for the nursing department. Grant funding for the purchase of SNAP has been obtained, and a timeline for purchase is in process. Additionally, our two nursing coordinators are commended for their initiative in writing a health grant for FY '09, providing to the District \$85,000 for the next five years.

The Performing Arts

At the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, the Band and Chorus programs continued to flourish as they performed in and around our community, and more. The Band marched in the Acton Memorial Day Parade and also the Boxborough Fifer's Day Parade in honor of the town's 225th anniversary. A number of our choral ensembles sang at West Acton's Oktoberfest and also at a number of senior citizen events. Twenty of our student musicians from band, chorus and orchestra were selected to perform at the MMEA Eastern District Festival, held in January; eight of these earned All-State recommendations. Our Madrigal Singers put on a Madrigal Dinner for the community in which they performed a renaissance-style dinner theater. And finally, the Marching Band participated in the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in Washington, D.C. It was an outstanding trip on many levels as our students visited our nation's capital and viewed its many wonderful museums and landmarks, in addition to proudly marching in this very prestigious event.

Proscenium Circus continues to prepare and present outstanding dramatic and musical productions at the high school. Over 200 students participated in activities and shows throughout the year. The productions for the 2007-2008 season included the fall play, titled "Laramie Project," and the wonderful musical, "Brigadoon." The entry to the state drama festival was the play "Frankenstein," which was written by AB's own faculty member, English teacher Maria Anthony.

At the R. J. Grey Junior High School, the 8th-grade Band and Chorus each participated in the Great East Music Festival held at West Springfield High School in May. Both received Gold Medals for their performances. The JHS musical, "High School Musical," had a terrific run of

performances with a huge cast of approximately 100 students involved. Twenty-five students were selected to perform in the concert band, orchestra or chorus at the MMEA Eastern Junior District Music Festival held in March.

At the elementary schools, the Beginning and Advanced Bands performed very well in their Winter and Spring Concerts. The bands also performed at each school's Memorial Day Assemblies, along with songs and poems performed by individual classes.

The Visual Arts

Throughout the school year, student efforts and accomplishments in the Visual Arts program were exhibited in each of the seven schools and the High School Administrative Conference Room, as well as off-site venues. Student artwork appeared in various school newsletters, and a kindergarten student's drawing graced the cover of the Kindergarten Handbook.

In the highly competitive Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards, 24 ABRSD students (22 high school and two junior high) received a total of 27 state-level awards. These awards included: one American Vision Award (one of five awarded statewide), ten Gold Key Awards, eight Silver Key Awards, five Honorable Mention Awards. The American Vision, Gold Key and Silver Key student work was exhibited at the State Transportation Building in Boston during January and February. Award-winning students were recognized at an awards ceremony at Hancock Hall in Boston. Student work receiving Gold Key Awards was sent to New York for the National Scholastics judging. One high school student received an American Vision Award and another a Gold Key Award at the Scholastics National level. National Award winning work was exhibited in New York City art galleries during the month of June, and students were honored at an awards ceremony at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. One high school art teacher, the Visual Arts Director, and four high school students assisted teams of judges during the daylong Scholastics judging process held at the State Transportation Building in January. The K-12 Visual Arts Director also serves on the Massachusetts Scholastics Advisory Board.

Both ABRHS juniors who applied to Art All State, Worcester Art Museum, were selected. They were among 140 high school juniors statewide who were selected to participate in the competitive Art All-State program at the Museum, held in May. Art All-State is a weekend-long program for high school art juniors to work with their peers and with practicing artists who serve as mentors. Each district is limited to two student applicants. Selection is based upon digital images of student work, a written application, and an interview with a team of art educators. One ABRHS art teacher and the Art Director served on interview teams. The K-12 Visual Arts Director serves on the Art All-State Steering Committee.

High school students in the Junior/Senior Portfolio class prepared and exhibited their work in a show entitled "Elections," which was held at the Acton Memorial Library in April. During the month of May, students in the Digital Imagery II class had a show of their work at the Sargent Memorial Library in Boxborough. The show was entitled "Inspiration Period."

Students in Advanced Drawing/Painting, Junior/Senior Portfolio, and Art History classes visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the spring. The focus of this trip was for students to gain exposure to actual works of art and to compare and contrast works of art.

AB graduates who are majoring in art at the college level returned to share their experiences with students in the Junior-Senior Portfolio class. Advice on the college application process was also shared.

During March, Acton and Acton-Boxborough student artwork was exhibited in the annual Youth Art Month Show at the Worcester Art Museum. Over fifty AB/APS student works were included. There was an opening reception for students, their families and art teachers in the Museum's Renaissance Court. The Conant, Douglas, Gates, Merriam and McCarthy-Towne Schools, as well as RJ Grey Junior High and the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, were all represented in this show.

A show of representative student artwork from each of the seven schools was on display at the Acton Senior Center during the month of May.

The grade 8/Art 2 art teacher at RJG organized and led the annual school-wide "Unification Project," where students and staff were each encouraged to create a mixed media piece that voiced their personality and personal interests. These mixed media works were assembled into mobiles and hung in the RJG Rotunda area as symbols of the school's unity.

K-12 Visual Arts staff participated in a book study group based on Eliot Eisner's "The Arts and The Creation of Mind."

Art teachers of grades K through 6 continued to meet and develop rubrics for art units of study. They collaborated on a policy proposal for elementary art assessment.

One high school art teacher's work was chosen for the National Juried Show, "American Summer," at the Kingston Gallery, Boston, as well as for a juried show at the West Hartford Art League, Hartford, Ct. Another high school art teacher's work was chosen to be included in a show at the Cambridge Art Center, Cambridge, MA. One elementary art teacher had a solo exhibit of her work at the Kingston Gallery, Boston. The same art teacher did a 3-week summer artist residency at the Hambidge Center in Georgia.

High school students had the opportunity to participate in Photo Club and in Art Club, both of which met after school one afternoon a week throughout the year. High school students participated in an initiative to collect and send art supplies to third world countries.

A Drawing Club and Clay Club were offered after school at Douglas School during the fall and spring.

The Visual Art Director's work was included in a faculty show at the Worcester Art Museum in the spring, entitled "Works in Progress."

The Visual Arts Director was awarded a Kinnicutt Grant from the Worcester Art Museum to do research on architecture in Greece. She spent several weeks in Greece researching, writing and photographing and made a presentation of this work at the New England Art Education Conference, Hyannis, in the fall of 2007.

The Visual Arts Director was named “Massachusetts Art Educator of the Year, Supervision and Administration, 2008” and honored at an awards ceremony at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in May. Her name has been placed in nomination for the “New England Art Educator of the Year, Supervision and Administration” award.

Technology

Instructional Technology

During the 2007-2008 school year, many instructional technology projects were initiated and successfully implemented. The Department of Technology Integration and Instruction, directed by Priscilla Kotyk, had the following initiatives.

Districtwide

The district continues its commitment to have all curriculum documentation available on the district website. The site is reviewed on an ongoing basis and additional documentation is added, presenting new courses and programs.

The online professional development catalog of offerings (Acton/Acton-Boxborough SmartPD) has been well received by the teachers. Staff members may access their professional development records at any time. These records will summarize for each staff member the courses/workshops s/he has completed, earned PDPs/Credits to date, and registration confirmations for future workshops and courses. In addition, the site is a repository of informational documents pertaining to professional development.

Our department’s part-time web-designer redesigned several websites during the year. Students learning about Acton’s history can easily locate information on the *Acton Long Ago* website. Our department website is being redesigned in order to make it more user friendly for teachers and students. In addition to the district sites, we have helped teachers at all grade levels create classroom websites. We developed specific templates and a scalable deployment that has enabled many teachers to communicate with students and families via the Internet.

High School

Many exciting ongoing projects are underway in the area of instructional technology. Students are using technology tools to create multimedia presentations, research course topics, and access online course-related materials. Several technology-related electives are offered, including but not limited to: web design, computer-aided design, programming, engineering, and broadcasting. Teachers are using our course management program, Moodle, to offer online courses and provide supplemental material to students.

The High School Technology Committee, with representation from all departments, met periodically to share best practices with technology and discuss ideas around professional development for teachers and technical issues or concerns. The high school technology planning committee meets regularly to discuss hardware deployments, software purchases, replacement computers, and new initiatives.

Junior High School

The junior high is continuing its commitment to expand the number of multimedia classrooms and to provide laptops to teachers. To complement the instructional use of technology, SMARTboards were installed in two classrooms. With training, teachers have been able to capitalize on the use of these interactive whiteboards for instruction.

Teachers and students continue to use technology in all content areas to enhance teaching and learning. Various exploratory courses use instructional technology to learn information skills, computer-aided design, and engineering design concepts. In some cases, students create multimedia final projects that express their curricular understandings.

The counseling department is developing a website, *Voices of RJ Grey*, which will offer information regarding various aspects of school culture and issues facing young teens.

Elementary Schools

An Acton Public Schools Steering Committee met regularly to discuss teacher and student technology needs. An APS vision and implementation plan was developed and presented to school committee. Teachers made presentations that demonstrated the importance of instructional technology at the elementary level.

At each grade level meeting, teachers were introduced to several technology-related activities. Teachers discussed and reflected on the value of instructional technology. In addition, teachers made a grade-level nature movie that was made available to all the teachers.

In all five elementary schools, teachers use mobile Alphasmart labs. Alphasmarts are electronic keyboards. The labs come equipped with management software that allows teachers to distribute to and gather information from all thirty Alphasmarts at the same time.

Information Technology

During the 2007-2008 school year, the district's Information Technology department provided valuable technology support services. The Information Technology department, directed by Steve Hall, had the following accomplishments.

Districtwide

The Information Technology department coordinated and implemented a large number of infrastructure upgrades. In order to support the new Acton Public School laptops to be added in FY09, new servers and services had to be brought online. The existing "core" servers were also updated to support those new laptops, as well as other new services and initiatives. In order to provide a much-needed improvement to its Internet capacity, the district's Internet access was upgraded to support the higher-bandwidth needs of modern technology. This also required upgrades to portions of the district's core network equipment, as well upgrades to its spam filter and web security filter systems. Many other infrastructure systems were upgraded to provide timely, efficient, and improved services. The Information Technology department continues to provide infrastructure, technical support services, project management, and strategic planning for a wide range of technology-related functions.

High School

The IT department performed maintenance and software updates on roughly 600 teacher laptop computers, computer labs, desktop computers, and printers.

Junior High School

The IT department performed maintenance and software updates on roughly 240 teacher laptop computers, computer labs, desktop computers, and printers.

Elementary Schools

The IT department performed maintenance and software updates on roughly 450 teacher laptop computers, computer labs, desktop computers, and printers.

Summer School

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Summer School had another successful year in 2008. With our enrollment of 494 students, we served nearly 100 more students than in 2005. Fifteen percent of our students came from twelve other districts. Several Math, Science, and Physical Education courses reached capacity, forcing us to turn away students not currently enrolled in the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

The number of student scholarships increased by 10% from 2007.

The number of faculty positions remained at 28, the same number as in '07.

The summer of 2008 also saw a 3% increase in faculty salaries; this was the first such increase since 2005. Tuition receipts continue to allow us to function as a self-sustaining educational program.

Summer School course changes (from 2007) include: the addition of an Engineering course and a Physics course, running the French 1 - 2 curriculum, and the addition of one Math Algebra I section.

We continue to serve Acton, Boxborough, and several outlying communities with first rate, summertime, K -12 educational opportunities.

Community Education

The Community Education office is located in the Administration Building, 15 Charter Road, Acton. Its staff organizes, staffs and directs the following programs and activities.

Day and Evening Classes: More than 2,000 classes are offered yearly for children, teens and adults. Classes and other programs are listed in *INTERACTION*, the Community Education catalog that is mailed four times a year to over 21,000 area homes. More than 12,000 students enroll in classes each year.

Extended Day Program: Serving 250 Acton families and 70 Boxborough families, Extended Day offers quality before- and after-school care for children in grades K-6.

Preschool Program: Located at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, the Community Education Child Development Preschool is the laboratory for the Child Development Course. Completely funded and staffed by Community Education, the Child Development/Preschool course awards seven elective credits toward graduation. Preschool has a total enrollment of 32 (12 three year-olds on Tuesday and Thursday; 20 four year-olds on Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

All-Day Kindergarten Program: Community Education administers the business affairs of the All-Day Kindergarten programs at Douglas, Conant, Gates, McCarthy-Towne and Merriam Schools.

Summer Day Program: Located at the Administration Building, this program offers weeklong sessions of summer activities to more than 80 children per week in grades 1-6. Also provided is a preschool summer program (Summer Capers and Friday Frolics) for four and five year-olds, vacation programs (offering enrichment activities and day care during school vacations), and many short sport clinics.

Youth Basketball League: Offering 12 weeks of coaching, practice and league play to more than 1,000 boys and girls in grades 3 and up, the league is staffed by more than 110 paid and volunteer coaches, timers, and referees. Community Education runs clinics for referees at no charge.

Driver Education: Community Education runs a Registry-approved driving school, offering classroom instruction and on-road training to 290 students annually.

Pool & Fieldhouse Programs: Located at ABRHS, the Pool & Fieldhouse Program consists of family open swim and open gym times for basketball on the weekends. Also offered in this facility is a full Red Cross Swim Program, a youth swim team, master's swim, morning and evening lap swim, and water exercise classes.

Community Education also conducts classes and schedules drop-in times for the public at the Fitness Center, located at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

Schedule of School Fields: Little league, Pop Warner, Youth Lacrosse and Youth Soccer, as well as individuals, businesses and community organizations, receive permits for school field use through Community Education. Fees charged are returned to the schools' Facility Department for field maintenance. Community Education also schedules Leary Field for school and community use.

Scheduling Use of School Buildings: All evening, weekend, holiday, and vacation use of the seven school buildings is scheduled through Community Education.

Community Education receives no funding from the school districts or town and runs all programs on a self-sustaining basis. Moneys are returned to the following for use of space and equipment – AV, Technology Department, Physical Education Department, Art Department, Facilities, and the Central Office.

For more information about Community Education and the programs that it offers, call (978) 266-2525.

Facilities and Transportation

The Facilities Department met the challenges of completing its major building cleaning and preparation while managing project work and the ever-growing demands of increased summer programs in the buildings. Phase one of the Acton Public Schools Capital Plan was completed on schedule and on budget. This included updating the entire heating systems in the Douglas, Conant, and Gates Schools. The old, inefficient boilers were successfully replaced with new, state of the art, high efficiency condensation Viessmann boilers. We also updated the building controls and installed new, efficient, variable drive univentilators in the rooms. The project should save APS thousands of dollars per year in operating costs and reduce the overall carbon footprint of the Town of Acton. Additionally, we put the finishing touches on last year's Baseball and Tennis Lighting Project by installing safety netting around the baseball field to further protect spectators and tennis players. Other projects that were completed that fall outside the normal summer cleaning and preparation are as follows:

- Upgraded the electrical supply and installed a new hot water heater in the Leary Field Concession Stand.
- Revamped campus vehicular signage.
- Installed new tiles in the lobby and gym of the Administration Building.
- Resurfaced the R. J. Grey tennis courts.
- Installed a new volleyball anchoring system in the R. J. Grey gym.
- Refurbished the bleachers in the R. J. Grey gym.
- Installed air conditioning in a new computer lab in R. J. Grey.
- Upgraded critical air conditioning system in the R. J. Grey MDF closet.
- Installed speed bumps outside R. J. Grey for increased pedestrian safety.
- Replaced walk-in refrigerator and freezer at the Gates Elementary School.
- Created a new conference room space and new kitchen storage at the Conant Elementary School.
- Repaved the majority of the Douglas Elementary School parking lots.

Before the start of school, 2008, we hope to resurface the High School Field House gym floor, as well as complete a minor resurfacing of the Leary Field track.

In Conclusion

This report demonstrates that the Acton Public Schools and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District are complex organizations. Nonetheless, the districts possess a clear mission and vision. They are fortunate to possess a dedicated staff, who make a habit of constant self-reflection and, as resources allow, of renewal.

Our students, teachers and administrators continue to perform at high levels – academically, athletically, artistically, personally and professionally – and so the Acton Public Schools and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District maintain a reputation that attracts people to the communities and to our schools. It is our intention to continue to provide the best possible education to the communities and to seek continued financial and moral support for this very important endeavor.

The towns of Acton and Boxborough have a great investment in the schools since the schools serve the communities' youth and adult populations through public schooling, Community Education, and as a center for much community activity. This is a win-win situation for both the towns and the schools that we want to maintain for the future.

William Ryan
Superintendent of Schools
On Behalf of the School Committees
January 2009