

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

**EDUCATION REPORT**  
September 2009 – August 2010

**INTRODUCTION**

The 2009-2010 school year included 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 School District continued to research, develop, 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.

**ENROLLMENT**

The October 1, 2009 elementary school enrollment increased by 64 students, from 2,559 to 2,623. Of the total number enrolled, 23 were special education students attending “out-of-district” schools – a decrease of two students from the previous October 1. Kindergarten enrollment increased by 36 students, from 304 to 340. There were no school choice students at the elementary level, although twenty were children of out-of-town staff members.

The junior high school enrollment for October 1 decreased by 26 students, from 1017 to 991, with seven school choice students. Twelve were special education students attending out-of-district schools.

The high school enrollment decreased from 2,005 to 1,999, a difference of six students. There were 45 school choice students at the high school – a decrease of 21 students from the previous year. Of the total number enrolled, 46 were special education students attending out-of-district schools.

**PERSONNEL**

Staffing changes for the 2009-10 school year were affected by the June 2009 retirement of six Acton Public and four Acton-Boxborough Regional teachers. Leaves of absence for seven ABRSD teachers and eight APS teachers were granted, and five APS and seven AB resignations were received. The 11.2 ABRSD and 8.7 APS full-time-equivalent new teachers who were hired filled these vacancies and additional openings.

**CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

During the 2009-2010 school year, the high school prepared for its upcoming decennial NEASC evaluation by completing a self-study. This process included collecting and analyzing data, examining organizational and instructional practices, and thoroughly documenting the school’s programs. Faculty, parents and students participated in the process of preparing eight separate reports, which were then approved by the faculty. These reports will be submitted to the members of the NEASC visiting committee when they arrive in the fall of 2010, providing them an initial understanding of the school, its philosophy, practices and programs. In addition, the high school faculty continued to create and refine their curriculum offerings, including in some instances integrating technology in the delivery of content. Cross-disciplinary connections continued to be created and strengthened; this provided a unique opportunity for faculty to develop and articulate shared objectives.

At the junior high school, specific departmental goals were implemented throughout the year. The English department, working together with the high school English department, evaluated their newly developed units to ensure smooth grade-level transitions. The world language and mathematics departments integrated technology into their curriculums, while the social studies department incorporated drama and role-playing into their curriculum. The science department implemented a new book on cells and heredity and the visual arts department used newly created videos for their classrooms.

The elementary schools . . .

- Continued adding to the “Acton Long Ago” website, with the addition of second grade projects highlighting three aspects of their study of the topic: Explaining Artifacts, descriptions of the Acton Quilt, and Old School Day. Digital voice recordings were completed, using recorders purchased with grant funds from MASS Computer Using Educators Network.
- Implemented the revised districtwide Wellness Policy.
- Continued the mathematics assessment project for kindergarten through grade two, with training sessions and materials provided for special educators, as well as classroom teachers.
- Hosted a giant traveling map of Africa that visited all five schools and gave almost every student a chance to “walk across Africa” in stockinged feet.
- Offered Family Nights at each school, with the physical education staff showcasing current teaching methods and activities.
- Continued the third-, fifth- and sixth-grade science/math partnerships offered through the School-Business Partnership program.

### **Wellness**

A task force met throughout the year to develop a districtwide bullying policy and make plans for implementation.

### **Parent Involvement Project (PIP) Programs**

The Acton PIP continued to offer high-quality science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences for Acton and Boxborough families. An Acton PIP event is curriculum-centered and “hands-on.”

- A major PIP event held in 2009 was the Discover STEM event (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Held at ABRHS, Discover STEM is a “reverse science fair” that takes place every other year. Exhibitors included engineers, scientists, technology professionals, and AB students who specialized in engineering, robotics, green energy and banking technology. Plans are underway for the 2011 event.
- Other annual PIP events included the 4th-grade Star Party, the 3<sup>rd</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade Market Math events at Roche Brothers, and Family Domino/Games Night.

### **The Discovery Museums**

In return for the use of space at the Administrative Building as a distribution center for the Museums’ Traveling Science Workshop Program, the Discovery Museums continued to offer a series of three free outreach programs. Each of our five elementary schools has taken advantage of these “Traveling Science” Workshops.

### **School-Business Partnership**

The following represents a sampling of activities:

- Our Business Partnership Projects continued to support grades 3 and 5 to enhance the teaching and learning of “Electricity” and “Simple Engineering.”
- The Acton Water District and the Health Department continued to support and enrich our science and social studies units with classroom visits and field trips.
- At the 6th grade, new partnerships were formed with Cambridge Savings Bank and Northern Bank and Trust. These banks join Middlesex Bank, Enterprise Bank, and Workers’ Credit Union. All five elementary schools now have banking partnerships that help support the teaching of mathematics and financial literacy.
- Job Shadowing – Over 150 high school students visited over thirty business sites to learn about careers and the workplace.
- Career Speakers – Over 500 high school students listened to speakers who shared information about their work place and career paths for their fields.
- Senior Internship – Sixty-three students participated in a three-week, thirty-hours per week, “hands-on” experience in a work site during the last three weeks of their senior year.

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

### **ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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

- 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 take place, 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.
- 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 the fall of 2009, David Krane joined our school district to become Principal of McCarthy-Towne School, replacing Nancy Kolb at the end of her one-year position as Interim Principal.

## **ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

### **R. J. Grey Junior High School**

R. J. Grey began the 2009-2010 school year with 977 students: 475 in the seventh grade and 502 in the eighth based on October 1 data. This was a decrease of 25 students from the enrollment of October 1, 2008. As school began, the administrative team (Principal Craig Hardimon, Assistant Principal Allison Warren, and Assistant Principal Andrew Shen) 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 seventh and eighth 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 enables staff to create a strong web of support to enhance student success. A large school becomes a smaller school. With consistent communication among team teachers, issues are addressed early and students have an opportunity to develop close relationships with their teachers, as well as with a familiar peer group. Moreover, 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: meeting the needs of the young adolescent, maintaining curricular quality and interdisciplinary opportunities, creating a sense of community, and promoting citizenship.

During the 2009-10 school year, seventh- and eighth-grade students were distributed among four “full” teams. Each full seventh-grade team had approximately 108 students supported by five core academic teachers (English, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Spanish and/or French). In addition to the four full teams in seventh grade, R. J. Grey introduced a half team, which had approximately fifty students and three teachers (English/Social Studies, Math/Science, and World Language). The addition of the half team provided additional structure and supports for the district’s highly specialized and successful Connections program, reduced overall seventh-grade team sizes, enhanced communication between core curricular teachers, and increased home/school communication.

In grade eight, each team averaged 119 students and five core academic teachers (Math, Science, English, Social Studies, and Spanish and/or French). On an ongoing basis, teachers planned integrated curricular activities that helped students see the relationships between various subjects.

It is important to note that all teams provide the same level of academic rigor and social opportunities. Similar supports and resources are provided as well. Specifically, all students participate in 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 also 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 include 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,” a combination of curriculum-related mini-courses and structured study halls with team teachers.

In October 2009, 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. With that said, there is some variation in scores from year to year as students change at a particular grade level. For Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and students with specific disabilities, we recognize that matriculating through our schools sometimes requires more time to cover and achieve proficiency of grade-level concepts and skills. In this regard, administrators and staff have analyzed MCAS results in collaboration with regular education, identified the specific sub-groups that need attention, noted the individual students who need instructional support, and met with department heads and teachers to create an instructional plan that meets the needs of these students. Using the new grade 7 mathematics textbook, there has already been a positive result from a mathematics program that consistently uses the same strategies and terminology in instructional practices.

For many students, learning and connecting with members of the R. J. Grey community took place through our extracurricular programs. 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 that helped to support these programs. The intramural program was available to all students, meeting either before or after school. These intramurals included basketball, lacrosse, and strength training. Other after-school activities included the Ski Club, Adopt-a-Grandparent, Jazz Band, Speech and Debate Team, Chess/Board Games Club, Math Counts, and the Yearbook. The school musical, “Seussical,” 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 drawings were then hung in the rotunda area on three-dimensional displays painted the color of each team.

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, staff vs. student basketball challenge, the end-of-year seventh-grade trip to Kimball’s and eighth-grade day at Canobie Lake Park, and the Student Recognition Assembly.

Through the involvement of the Student Council, students connect with each other in a number of ways. This group helped to plan schoolwide activities, dances, and service learning projects. In addition to our annual community service learning projects, such as the Coat Drive, where over 500 coats were collected and distributed to families in need, or our involvement in collecting holiday Toys for Tots, our students led a schoolwide sneaker drive. Over 200 pairs of gently used sneakers for men, women and children were donated to local area shelters and thrift shops. Some shoes were also boxed and shipped to a village in Kenya to help support aspiring athletes. This year, our school also participated in a walk to the West Acton Food Pantry; a day of maintenance work on parks and conservation lands; and Project Tamaa, which raised money and awareness for a number of international causes.

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 sixth-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 R. J. Grey highlight was our annual Project Wellness Day. Project Wellness is a daylong conference for seventh-grade students and a parent or guardian, designed to empower parents and teenagers in addressing 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 10, 2010 to learn about ways to communicate with each other about difficult issues and sensitive topics, ranging from time management to nutrition to navigating relationships. Approximately 900 students, family members, and staff participated in this event.

Over the course of the school year, R. J. Grey staff continued with initiatives that promoted learning, mutual respect, and opportunities for professional growth. In response to parent, staff, and student feedback, building-based professional development opportunities focused on addressing and responding to incidents of bullying, teasing, and harassment for both staff and students, including but not limited to promoting respect for self and others, becoming a more active bystander, and ensuring concurrent responses for both victims and aggressors. In addition, the November 2009 districtwide Professional Day offered the faculty and staff required Category 1 English Language Learner training to better meet the needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse student population. All staff participated, completed necessary requirements, and received certification.

At the end of the 2009-2010 school year, two veteran staff members, Carmen Comella and Annelyse Roach, 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 2010 was comprised of 461 students; of these, 92% enrolled at four-year schools, while 6% continued their education at two-year colleges, prep, and technical schools.

**Standardized Test Results:** Average SAT scores for the 2010 senior class again exceeded those of state and national populations. An increase from 91% to 92% of seniors took the SATs, well above the state average, which remained at 84%, and the national average of 47%. Our average combined score for the SAT was 1888, up 23 points from last year's seniors and 352 points higher than the average combined Massachusetts score of 1536.

**National Merit Scholarship Competition:** Seventeen members of the Class of 2010 achieved semi-finalist recognition; 63 others received letters of commendation.

**National Honor Society:** Ninety-nine members of the class of 2011 were inducted into the NHS.

**National World Language Honor Societies:** In 2010, 33 students of Spanish qualified for membership in the local chapter of the National Spanish Honor Society; 19 students qualified for the National French Honor Society; five students qualified for the National Latin Honor Society.

National Latin Exam: In the 2010 National Latin Exam, 56 students received gold medals and 32 received silver; 19 students received magna cum laude recognition, and eight students received cum laude recognition.

Academic Decathlon Team: The team of nine regulars and twenty alternates won the Massachusetts State Championship for the 18th time in the past 19 years. A total of 45 Massachusetts high schools competed. In addition, the team placed 18th overall in the country.

Mathematics Team and Competitive Activities: In the 2009-2010 season, the AB math team finished in first place in the monthly competition in the Massachusetts Mathematics League. The team continued on to the state competition run by the Massachusetts Association of Mathematics Leagues in April 2010 and placed second among large schools in Massachusetts. They then competed in the New England Association of Mathematics Leagues Competition in May 2010 and placed first among large schools in New England.

In addition to the team competition, twelve students were finalists in the Massachusetts Mathematics Olympiad exam – Xiaoyu He with a perfect score, as well as Mo Zhou, Alan Chiao, Martin Ma, David Fink, Ruifan Pei, Sinan Zhang, Brian Yang, Danny Chiao, Matt Dai, Naman Bharadwaj and Alison Wu. In the National AMC, seven students placed in the top 10% nationwide, and three of these – Xiaoyu He, Martin Ma and Mo Zhou – advanced to the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of this competition, the USAMO (United States of American Mathematics Olympiad).

Speech and Debate: The team was composed of over fifty students from grades 9-12. Competing in over ten 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 in each event. Competing in the Massachusetts Forensics League and the Massachusetts Catholic Forensics League, the team was matched against teams from schools across the state and consistently placed in the medal rounds. The team's top competitors also competed on a national level at Harvard University.

Athletics: During the 2009-10 school year, participation in athletics remained consistent, with over 1,800 students in grades 7-12 taking part. League Championships were won by field hockey, girls' soccer, boys' basketball, boys' indoor track, softball, girls' tennis and boys' spring track. In the fall season, the girls' field hockey team won the State Championship, and the girls' soccer team captured the Division I North Championship. In the spring the girls' tennis team competed for the divisional championship. Amy Li also represented AB in the MA individual tennis championship, finishing second.

Proscenium Circus: Proscenium Circus, the student drama group at the high school, functions as a teaching and learning theater. In addition to offering outstanding instruction in technical theater, acting, movement, scene design, scene painting, costume design, hair and makeup, and stage management, PC produced 23 outstanding award-winning dramatic and musical productions in 2009-2010. Over 350 students participated in activities and shows throughout the year. The productions for the 2009-2010 year included the fall play, "Our Town," directed by Dr. Maureen Shea, visiting Professor from Emerson College; the Cole Porter signature musical, "Kiss Me Kate"; and the State Drama Guild Festival Play, "Waiting for Lefty," which was a finalist in the competition. Rounding out the year were the competitive class plays and the festival of ten-minute plays.

Peer Leadership Program: Peer Leadership had another very successful year. The peer leaders facilitated alcohol/drug awareness programs in Acton's elementary schools and are actively trying to start a program at the Blanchard Elementary School in Boxborough. They also led social development programs at R. J. Grey Junior High. With a new, energetic student board in place, we look forward to another successful year.

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. *The Spectrum* is financially self-supporting through advertising and contributions from the PTSO.

Student Council: The primary student government group, consisting of more than 45 students, elected representatives of their classes and also walk-on members. Student Council is responsible for organizing schoolwide 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 publish two to three issues of student poetry, prose, lyrics, essays, narratives, translations, and art. Students write, edit, design, print, assemble, publicize, and distribute 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. Art students also meet weekly to create art or illustrations for specific pieces of writing for the magazine. “Window Seat” students 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 several years ago when a group of enthusiastic students approached English teacher Dennis Kavanagh with the idea. The magazine puts out two to three issues per year. *Idiosyncrasy* is a thematic magazine that highlights a unique cultural aspect in every issue with each writer approaching it from a different perspective. 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. In 2009, *Idiosyncrasy* won the American Scholastic Press Association’s First Place Award for college and high school magazines and won an additional award for Outstanding Concept.

Harvard Model Congress: Seven juniors represented ABRHS at this four-day government simulation. The Acton League of Women voters generously underwrote their participation. Those representing were: Julia Baum, Alex Cates, Kelly Donovan, Joe Flynn, Trevor Graney, Aislinn Pallera and Michael Ren.

Career Exploration Activities: Beginning in November, approximately 150 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 and to parents and other local residents willing to host students. At three Career Breakfasts during the year, career speakers talked to groups of students interested in their fields of work. Over 150 students attended each of the three events. Sixty-three 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 April 30, the Class of 2010 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 sixteenth 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 tenth Community Service Awards Night on January 18, 2010. At this ceremony 668 students received recognition for their volunteer efforts.

### **PUPIL SERVICES**

Maintaining the quality of Pupil Services programs and services during times of fiscal austerity continues to be an important area of focus, with on-going consideration for cost cutting options and potential reorganization. Generating revenue through specialized programs, monitoring and evaluating CASE accessibility, and prudently allocating IDEA stimulus monies all help to continue our efforts in supporting building-based initiatives regarding curriculum and specialized programming.

Pupil Services continues to participate in the design of professional development that reflects the districts' core values and needs. Specifically, all staff participated in an introduction to the principles of Second Language Acquisition (Category 1 ELE Training) required by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This professional workshop offered educators key skills and knowledge for helping English language learners succeed in school and strategies for adapting instruction and materials to better understand academic content, developing social and academic language, and enhancing participation in classroom activities.

Grant funding further enabled Pupil Services to provide professional development training to nurses, clinicians and specialists to better understand mental health issues impacting student education, specifically how student depression may manifest in school settings and factors contributing to school phobia and school refusal. Moreover, opportunities to increase the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders continued, fostering social pragmatic language and reinforcing/generalizing academic, motor, language, self-care and social skills at all levels.

As we become more continuously focused on student health and safety, reducing stress, promoting the sense of well being in our Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools, building partnerships, and enhancing communication continue to be paramount to our community's effectiveness. As such, the first annual Acton-Boxborough Community Symposium welcomed businesses and organizations that attended with a sense of responsibility and obligation to our children and to the community-at-large, drawing resources from across the community. Our school districts continue to believe that outstanding internal and external connectedness is key to facilitating information before we face insurmountable challenges or a crisis. Utilization of our teams and partnerships with our community and the development of a Youth Plan ensure a safe environment for our children and our students.

We continue to enhance the home/school partnership with the SpEd PAC by promoting co-sponsorship of professional activities, particularly for parents and guardians. Currently, viable options for streamlining the efficiency and effectiveness of the IEP process are being considered. A study group was formed to consider and discuss a number of options for improving the efficiency of the team meeting process, and a pilot "draft IEP" project is in place for the upcoming school year. The OnTeam Communiqué continues to be a viable mechanism for communication between Pupil Services and home.

In strong partnership with the local and state health departments, the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools assured that a meaningful plan was developed to respond to an influenza pandemic. In this regard, the Acton and Acton-Boxborough nursing staff played an integral role in protecting the health and safety of our staff, students, and their families. Working in partnership with the Acton Board of Health, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, consistent communication between home and school ensured a coordinated, meaningful plan for responding to an influenza pandemic. Through regular meetings to address influenza preparedness, action steps were taken to secure, distribute, inoculate, and monitor flu vaccines over the last several months, maximizing protection to our student body and faculty. In addition, the district made available,

through mass distribution, helpful guidelines (precautionary steps to take for seasonal flu, H1N1, and influenza-like illnesses) for both the schools and the community.

The Anti-Bullying Task Force began its work in June 2008, committed to creating practical guidelines so that all children, staff, and faculty feel safe within the school and/or work environment. Participants include parents, teachers, a school resource officer, school counselors, technology specialists, and building-based administrators.

Four subcommittees met regularly and grappled with elements of an effective bullying policy that addresses cyberspace issues and defines forbidden behaviors and conditions where school staff must react and respond. Additionally, the Task Force addressed recommendations regarding the social programs, research-based curriculums, and trainings necessary to prevent incidents from happening. Task Force members drafted a revised districtwide policy for bullying prevention, as well as a bullying prevention and intervention plan for consideration by the Superintendent and, ultimately, the Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Committees.

The bullying prevention and intervention approach is proactive and educational and includes five specific components:

- Commitment to a pro-social research-based curriculum and/or program that promotes positive peer relationships.
- Annual bullying prevention training for all students and staff.
- Adequate supervision of students to address bullying prevention and intervention.
- Ongoing training and support of teachers and school staff in the use of proactive and effective strategies for responding to incidents of aggression and supporting bystanders and targets.
- Systematic evaluation of the overall bullying prevention approaches used by the school.

### **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 elsewhere. In addition to marching in our own Acton Memorial Day Parade, the band marched in a number of parades outside of our community, including the Marlborough Labor Day Parade, the Boston Columbus Day Parade, the Quincy Christmas Parade (where they took 1<sup>st</sup> place overall), and a very special appearance in the Citrus Day Parade in Orlando, FL for the New Year! A number of our choral ensembles sang at West Acton's Oktoberfest and at a number of senior citizen events. The choral department put on a wonderful talent show traditionally known as "Cabaret." Twenty-seven of our student musicians from band, chorus and orchestra were selected to perform at the MMEA Eastern District Festival held in January; fifteen of these earned All-State recommendations. Our Madrigal Singers put on a Madrigal Dinner for the community, at which they performed a renaissance-style dinner theater.

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. Each received Gold Medals for their performances. The JHS musical, "Seussical the Musical," had a terrific run of performances with a huge cast of approximately 100 students involved. Eighteen students were selected to perform in the concert band, orchestra or chorus at the MMEA Eastern Junior District Music Festival held in March. The seventh- and eighth-grade band marched in the Boxborough Memorial Day Parade.

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 Gates School's chorus sang in a Pan Choral Concert with members of the junior high and high school choruses. The combined Acton Elementary School Band marched in the Acton Memorial Day Parade.

## 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 drawings by kindergarten students graced the cover of the Kindergarten Handbook.

In the highly competitive Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards, 25 ABRSD students (15 high school and 10 junior high) received a total of 25 state-level awards. These awards included: three Gold Key Awards, eleven Silver Key Awards, and eleven Honorable Mention Awards. The 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. The K-12 Visual Arts Director serves on the Massachusetts Scholastics Advisory Board.

The two ABRHS juniors who applied to Art All-State at the Worcester Art Museum were both selected for the program. They were among 144 high school juniors statewide who were selected to participate in the competitive 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. The K-12 Visual Arts Director serves on the Art All-State Steering Committee.

Senior students in the ABRHS Portfolio class prepared and exhibited their work in a show entitled "Elections," which was held at the Acton Memorial Library in April. Forty-four Photography class students exhibited work in a show entitled "Our Town," which was on display at the high school. The photography work of eight students was included in an exhibit, "Visions of Kelly's Corner," as part of a collaborative project by the Town of Acton, The Discovery Museums, Tufts University, and ABRHS. The "Envisioning Kelly's Corner" project was funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. AB photography student work was included in a photography show at the State Transportation Building in Boston, sponsored by the Massachusetts Education Association.

AB Portfolio class students participated in year two of a new interdisciplinary unit of study between the English and Visual Arts departments. Collaboration included multi-grade levels of students in English and Visual Arts classes working together and connecting with the community-based Robert Creeley Foundation. Portfolio students created broadside designs to accompany Creeley Foundation Award Winning Poet Gary Snyder's work. The award-winning, published, and signed broadside, designed by an AB Portfolio student, is now permanently on display at the Lamont Library at Harvard University.

AB parent and visiting artist Elissa Freud presented her work to the students in the Sculpture class. Students in Modern Art History, Advanced Drawing/Painting, and Junior/Senior Portfolio classes visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the spring.

During March, Acton and Acton-Boxborough student artwork was exhibited in the annual Youth Art Month Show at the Worcester Art Museum. Forty-two APS/AB student works were included. There was an opening reception for students, their families, and art teachers in the Museum's Renaissance Court. All seven schools were represented in this show.

During the month of April, the artwork of forty-seven students, from grades K through 12 and representing all the schools, was in the exhibit, "Places," at the Sargent Memorial Library, Boxborough. A show of representative student artwork from each of the schools was on display at the Acton Senior Center during the month of May. The work of thirty-eight students was included in this exhibit.

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.

K-12 Visual Arts staff participated in the second year of a curriculum review. The focus was on writing units of study in the department's new unit plan format.

An ABRHS art teacher's artwork was published in *New America Paintings (#86 Northeast Edition)*. *New American Paintings* was founded in 1993 as an experiment in art publishing. With more than 5,000 artists reviewed annually, it has become America's largest and most important series of art competitions.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Instructional Technology**

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Technology Integration and Instruction department completed many projects.

#### **Districtwide**

Both districts utilized PowerSchool Premier for their student information system (SIS) and E-Sped for their special education needs. All schools continue to be dedicated to harnessing the many features in PowerSchool, and it became one of the most heavily used systems. Over the course of the school year, the application provided scheduling, attendance, grading, and reporting tools essential to efficient school administration.

The districtwide implementation of on-line emergency cards used by families to enter student information electronically allowed for more time on instruction, as our teachers were no longer responsible for completing the task. Further, the consolidation and integration of data from within the districts' transportation and food service departments to provide on-line lunch counts, bus routes, and attendance information provided new data that the districts could use in their reports.

#### **High School**

Many teachers and students at the high school used technology to enhance the teaching and learning environment. As teacher technology proficiency levels continued to increase, students were given more opportunities to work with technology to enhance their learning. Students used technology tools to create multimedia presentations, research course topics, and access online course-related materials. Several technology-related electives were offered, including but not limited to: web design, computer-aided design, programming, engineering, Cisco Academy, and broadcasting. The number of teachers and students using our course management program, Moodle, continued to grow, with around 750 accounts being added throughout the year.

The high school Technology Committee met monthly to share best practices with technology and to discuss ideas around professional development for teachers, as well as technical issues or concerns. In the spring of 2009, 85 seniors volunteered to take the Educational Testing Service iSKILLS test to provide the district with data regarding our students' informational skills. Our students performed better than state average in all areas.

### Junior High School

Teachers and students continued to use technology in all content areas to enhance teaching and learning. Students had the opportunity to use technology and learn information skills through the use of three labs and a multi-media equipped library. Further, exploratory classes available to students taught computer-aided design and engineering design concepts. In some cases, students created multimedia final projects that expressed their curricular understandings. Teachers continued to create and/or maintain classroom websites, strengthening the communication link between teachers, families, and students.

### Elementary Schools

Focusing on increasing student access to computers, all elementary schools received MacBook computers and mobile carts. The Gates School also included a 15-unit stationary lab. Further, all elementary schools continued toward the goal of having multi-media equipment in all classrooms. Classrooms were equipped with an all-in-one SMART Board/AV system that provided easy-to-use software to enhance instructional delivery and engage students in their learning process.

All student computers were configured under one “master image,” incorporating global Internet settings and educational websites to provide a consistent, easy-to-use learning environment. For example, as each student opens the web browser to begin an Internet session, the homepage consists of the following resources: Acceptable Use Policy/Internet Safety, Online Encyclopedias, Curriculum Resources, Kid-friendly Search Engines, Destiny Library Catalog.

In all five elementary schools, teachers used mobile AlphaSmart and/or AlphaSmart NEO devices. For students in grades 3-4, these devices were used to teach typing skills. The labs come equipped with management software that allows teachers to distribute to and gather information from all thirty AlphaSmarts at the same time.

Designed to further instructional technology, teachers worked on creating individual teacher innovation plans or iTIPS. These plans were personally created to enhance a teacher’s instructional delivery or assist with management/administrative tasks with technology. Teachers were given the resources to articulate specific plans for using instructional technology tools and controlled their own learning to what was meaningful or relevant to them. Upon completion, teachers were more comfortable creating classroom websites, electronic newsletters, and digital assessment tools. They were able to utilize projectors, cameras, and web-based tools as instructional aids. Teachers created SMART Board lessons and multimedia projects, such as podcasts/vodcasts, wikis, and blogs.

The Integration Specialists continued to assess all technology products and services to improve teaching and learning on a school-by-school and district-level basis. All educational technology staff members worked closely with school technology committees to identify areas of technology that aligned with school improvement plans.

### **Information Technology**

During the 2009-2010 school year, the district’s Information Technology department provided technology support services.

### Districtwide

The Information Technology department completed:

- The installation of a Symmetra device provided for redundant, scalable double conversion on-line power protection, providing a centralized solution to power management issues being experienced.
- The districts’ student information system, PowerSchool, was moved to off-site hosting.

- A new wireless network was installed at each elementary school, completing the “wireless initiative project.” 100% wireless coverage is being provided at every building, in every classroom and administration office.
- All infrastructure support contracts were analyzed and adjusted, and new vendors were selected to maintain appropriate service levels, high availability, and alignment with budget realities.

### High School

The Desktop Support Specialists (1.8 FTE) prepared 61 new laptops and desktops, which replaced aging and unsupported computers used by teachers and students. They maintained over 750 computers and printers throughout the year.

### Junior High School

The Desktop Support Specialists prepared 34 new laptops and desktops, which replaced aging and unsupported computers used by teachers and students. They maintained approximately 350 computers and printers throughout the year.

### Elementary Schools

Twenty-seven classrooms were equipped with multimedia equipment (interactive whiteboards, video projectors, and sound systems). Desktop Support Specialists maintained approximately 500 elementary school computers and printers throughout the year.

## **SUMMER SCHOOL**

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Summer School had another successful year in 2010. With our enrollment of 519 students, we served twenty more students than in 2009. Ten percent of our students came from seven other districts. Several Math, Science, and Physical Education courses reached capacity much later in the summer, forcing us to turn away fewer students (than in 2009) not currently enrolled in the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

Summer School course changes included the addition of another Physical Education course and the addition of a College Application Preparation course. The number of faculty positions remained at 28.

The number of student scholarships increased by 3% from 2009.

Tuition receipts continue to allow us to function as a self-sustaining educational program. 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: Each year, Community Ed. offers nearly 2,000 classes for children, teens and adults. Classes and other programs are posted on the Community Ed. website: <http://comed.ab.mec.edu> and advertised in *INTERACTION*, the course catalog that is mailed four times a year to over 21,000 area homes. More than 10,000 students enroll in classes annually.

Extended Day: Serving 328 Acton families, Extended Day offers quality before- and after-school care for 422 children in grades K-6. Community Ed. runs a program at the Administration Building, as well as school-based programs at Conant, Gates, and McCarthy-Towne Schools.

Preschool Program: Located at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, the Community Ed. Child Development Preschool is the laboratory for the high school's Child Development Course. Students can earn elective credits toward graduation. The Preschool has a total enrollment of 26 (8 three-year-olds on Tuesday and Thursday; 18 four-year-olds on Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

All-Day Kindergarten Program: Community Ed. administers the business affairs of the All-Day Kindergarten program at each elementary school.

Summer Day Program: Located at the Administration Building, this program offers week-long sessions to an average of 83 children per week in grades 1-6. In 2011 it will be open to incoming kindergarteners as well. Activities include: Arts and Crafts, Music and Drama, Cooperative Games, Red Cross Swim Lessons, Free Swim, and Special Events.

Vacation Week Programs: During February and April school vacations, Community Ed. runs child care programs that include field trips and enrichment activities.

Youth Basketball League: Over a 10-week period, more than 1,000 boys and girls in grades 3 and up participate in weekly practices and league play. The league is staffed by more than 110 paid and volunteer coaches, timers, and referees.

Driver Education: Community Ed. runs a Registry-approved driving school, offering classroom instruction and on-road training to 280 students annually.

Pool & Fieldhouse Programs: Located at ABRHS, the Pool & Fieldhouse Program provides the public with opportunities to use the high school pool and fieldhouse on the weekends. In addition to open swim and gym, Community Ed. runs a full Red Cross Swim Program, a youth swim team, master's competitive swimming, morning and evening lap swim, and water exercise classes.

Fitness Center: Community Ed. staffs public drop-in times at the Fitness Center, located at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

Scheduling Use 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 Ed. Fees charged are returned to the school district to support the facilities.

Scheduling Use of School Buildings: Use of the seven school buildings outside of school hours is scheduled through Community Ed.

Community Education receives no funding from the school districts or towns and runs all programs on a self-sustaining basis. Moneys are returned to the districts to use for space and equipment. For more information about Community Education and the programs that it offers, call (978) 266-2525.

## **FACILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION**

We had a very short yet very productive summer in the Facilities Department. Aside from the annual summer cleaning, preventive maintenance, inspections, and basic work orders that we do annually, this summer we were able to accomplish a number of capital projects.

As a department we always have an eye on reducing our carbon footprint, and we try to focus capital projects in that direction. We do this because it is the right thing to do in terms of social responsibility, but also these projects tend to have a payback since they reduce our overall energy consumption, which in turn reduces the amount of money we spend in energy procurement. Projects that fell under this criteria for this summer included a lighting retrofit at the Administration Building; HVAC improvements at the Parker Damon Building; a roof replacement at Douglas; a solar power system installed at Douglas; energy efficient lighting fixtures and various upgrades at the junior high and the high school; replacement of the old school zone flashers on Route 111 and Hayward Road with new LED flashing signs; construction of a new “black box” teaching area at the high school, designed to support the performing arts programs; and replacement of hot water heaters at Conant, Douglas, Gates, and the Administration Building with new direct-demand energy-efficient hot water heaters.

Other capital projects that were completed include a rebuild of the boardwalk connecting Gates and Douglas over Fort Pond Brook. This project would not have happened without the Friends of the West Acton Boardwalk and significant community fund raising. Thank you to everyone involved. Additionally, we were able to repair catch basins at Gates and RJ Grey, as well as asphalt on campus and at Gates. We were also able, in conjunction with the Athletic Department, to replace the runways on the track at Leary Field for the Long Jump, Triple Jump and Pole Vault. Along those same lines, we were able to refinish and repaint the floors in the Field House at the high school, the lower gym at the high school, and the Gates gym floor.

We look forward to supporting the school district this coming year. Please feel free to contact the Facilities Department with any questions, comments, or concerns.

### **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 that 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

Stephen E. Mills  
Superintendent of Schools  
On Behalf of the School Committees  
January 2011