

the Lamplighter

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ABRHS Self-Study Accreditation Underway

Research on strong organizations consistently points to the important roles reflection, evaluation and feedback play in maintaining quality. Good organizations of all kinds – including schools – take the time to reflect on their practices, affirm their strengths, and identify their areas of weakness. We are no exception.

One of the feedback mechanisms used by high schools in New England is the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). NEASC is an accrediting agency, responsible for certifying the quality of any and all high schools in its catchment area. This certification is critical to us as it is one of the prime indicators that colleges and universities use to determine a high school's level of quality.

In addition to the obvious importance of NEASC's imprimatur, this is also a tremendous opportunity for the high school to receive significant feedback on its program and practices. The NEASC process is carefully structured in order to provide the school with focused and relevant feedback from peer educators.

The evaluation and accreditation process is meant to be a sort of spiral – ongoing and constant. However, every ten years the process "heats up" and requires more focused attention. Right now we are in the midst of that period as we prepare for our decennial evaluation by a visiting committee appointed by NEASC.

The first step in preparing for this site visit is for the school to review and revise (if necessary) its mission statement and its learning expectations for students. We spent the 2008-2009 school year doing just that. After significant reflection by the faculty and a series of open meetings for parents and students, we did make a change. Accordingly, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School's new mission is "Together we promote respect for self, others, and learning." The final version of this statement was written by an ABRHS student.

With our mission review complete, the next step in the process is a 'self study' – a process of collecting and analyzing data, examining practices, and document-

ing our program. Currently, the entire high school faculty, along with student and parent volunteers, is engaged in this process. Each piece of the report – there are eight sections – must then be approved by a vote of the faculty. The purpose of the self-study is to provide the members of the visiting committee with a description of the school and a grounding in its philosophy and practices.

(cont. on next page)

From the Superintendent

As we begin to construct next year's budget, it is important to acknowledge that this will be the most challenging school budget in recent memory. The Beacon recently quoted me as saying "This is the beginning of a long and painful journey."

Typically, school budgets must increase 4 - 5% from one year to the next simply to offer the same level of service in the same budget. There are certain fixed expenses over which none of us have control including: health insurance, utilities, charter school reimbursements, and out-of-district tuitions. At the same time, we are anticipating a decrease in state aid to our school districts.

The combination of these two factors - required increases in our local budgets with a serious decrease in state aid funding, creates a significant financial challenge as we move forward. My staff has already reduced this year's school budget by \$494,000. This was accomplished by eliminating a central office position, reducing custodial overtime hours, reducing some paraprofessionals' hours, and using some stimulus money.

As we move ahead to next year's budget, an approximately \$2 million difference exists between what is needed to maintain level service and the funding we anticipate receiving. The School Committee has already directed me to build in some reductions for next year. At the time of this writing, I anticipate approximately \$1.1 million of further reductions. This will have to come from the elimination of some positions and the reduction in hours of many others. I believe our school budgets must be a very transparent and public process. Part of my job is to see to it that all voices are heard while we make difficult decisions during these challenging times. I welcome your input.

Steve Mills

ABRHS Self-Study Accreditation...

All of this work is being completed in preparation for our decennial evaluation, which will be performed by the aforementioned visiting committee, who will be here on campus October 3-6, 2010. The group will be a collection of peer educators (likely 15-18 in total) from other high schools across the state and region. The participants are volunteers, who give of their time to perform this critical service – just as members of our high school faculty participate in site visits at other schools.

Following the site visit, we will be provided a report, which will affirm the strengths noted by the committee and provide feedback on areas where improvement is recommended. This will be tremendously useful to the high school and we will use these findings to set goals and determine areas of focus for the subsequent years.

There are many opportunities for parent and community involvement in this process. If you would like to get involved, please contact Alixe Callen, Principal at acallen@mail.ab.mec.edu.

Alixe Callen

Report on the Class of 2009

The ABRHS class of 2009 was composed of 489 members, 479 (98%) of whom planned to pursue post-secondary education. Of the 479 students, 92% enrolled in four-year schools, while 6% continued their education at two-year colleges, prep and technical schools.

Last year's seniors filed 3620 college applications for an average of 7.6 applications per student, up from 6.9 for the previous graduating class. 314 seniors (65% of those applying) submitted Early Decision or Early Action applications, a large increase from the 51% who applied early last year. In fact, 84% of all applications were processed by the end of December.

Graduates from the class of 2009 are attending schools in 34 states, Washington D.C., Canada, Germany, Ireland and Lebanon. Thirty-eight percent remained in Massachusetts, and 55% stayed in New England. Seniors chose private institutions (58%) more often than public universities (42%). The class of 2009 enjoyed the same overall acceptance rate (61% of all applications filed) than did the class of 2008. The overall acceptance at New England state universities was 75%, an increase from 68% for last year's seniors. The acceptance rate at UMass Amherst was 72%, up from 69% last year, although it has been declining since 2004 when 89% of AB applicants were accepted.

ABRHS Highlights

- This fall A-B received a Blue Ribbon Schools Award from the U.S. Department of Education. Only 17 public high schools in the country received this honor. Principal Alixe Callen and English teacher Jerry McDonald traveled to Washington, D.C. in November to accept the award.
- National Merit Scholarship - 17 students were named Semifinalists and 63 received Letters of Commendation
- Academic Decathlon Team placed first (out of 38 regional teams) in preliminary competition. State finals are in March
- Kudos to Proscenium Circus for their fall production of *Our Town*, enhanced by students' photography and a community collection for HGRM. The Musical *Kiss Me Kate* will be presented in late January/early February.
- The band won a silver medal in the MICCA state finals. The show was "Aaron Copeland: America's Composer" and marched in the Citrus Parade in Orlando, Florida in December.
- 27 student musicians were accepted to the Eastern District Senior Music Festival (Band, Chorus and Orchestra). 13 of these students earned All-State Recommendations.
- The ABRHS Choral program performed their annual outstanding variety show, "Cabaret Night".
- Athletic Achievements: Girls Field Hockey Division 1 State Champions; *Girls Soccer* Eastern MA Champions; Individual State Champions: Swim and Dive - 50 meter freestyle and 1 meter dive

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION

The Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, handicap or homeless in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs, and activities. Any person having inquiries or complaints concerning the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts' compliance with Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, ADA or Chapter 622 is directed to contact the Director of Pupil Services, Administration Building, 15 Charter Road, Acton, MA, at 978-264-4700, x3265, or write to the Office for Civil Rights, 33 Arch Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02109, or the Massachusetts Department of Education, Office of Program Quality Assurance, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148.

School Highlights

R.J. Grey Junior High

- Fall field trips to: Minuteman Tech, Christa McAuliffe Challenger Center, Mt. Wachusett
- Community Service activities included the 7 Red's Team - sweatshirt sale for hunger, 8 Green's Team - preserving conservation trails, 8 Orange's Team - Toy's for Tots collection, a school wide walk to the Acton Food Pantry, a school-wide shoe drive to support Kenyan sports programs, Annual Coats for Families Drive, and Project Tamaa raising funds for local African charities
- Annual Band and Chorus Concerts
- The Spring Musical Production will be "Seussical"
- Project Wellness Day is March 10, 2010 at Merrimack College

Conant

- New technology welcomed at Conant included Smartboards in grades 4, 5, and 6, and a new mobile laptop cart
- Before and After School programs are fully enrolled, new Enrichment program offerings include Math Olympiad and Dodgeball 101
- Highly successful 28th Annual Craft Fair
- Field trips to Shelburne Orchard and the DeCordova Art Museum
- Community Service efforts included thank you letters to servicemen and women on Veteran's Day, a warm clothing drive, and raising funds for a Community Supper through the annual Turkey Trot
- New vegetarian lunch choices were introduced through "tasting days" in December. These new choices included hummus, pita bread and veggie wraps. Yum!

Douglas

- 8th annual Peace Walk raised over \$3,000 to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan
- World Language program with Japanese instruction, K-2, and Chinese in grades 3-4
- Veteran's Day assembly, inviting veterans to celebrate through song, poetry and classroom visits
- Assembled and sold over 200 apple pies for Community Supper and bought toys for Acton Friends in Need
- "Quartet of Happiness" cultural program

Gates

- Celebrating our new Core Values: Generosity, Acceptance, Trust and Respect, Enthusiasm, Scholarship
- New Technology: Smartboard added to our library, 15 new desktops in the computer lab and a new laptop cart for classrooms
- PTO events include the Back to School Picnic, Spooktacular Fall Social and Gates Spruce Up Day/Fall Clean Up
- K – 6 Towel Drive for Acton Household Goods Recycling Ministry and Food Pantry Collection
- Field Trips to the Shelburne Farm, Plimoth Plantation, Drumlin Farm, Rock Walk at the Sarah Doublet Reservation, Lexington and Concord, Acton Memorial Library, and the West Acton Fire Department
- A cultural program sponsored Rob Surette's "Hero Art"

McCarthy-Towne

- SmartBoards in grade 4 classrooms, Wireless Internet throughout the Parker Damon Building, Mobile labs of Apple laptops
- Fall field trips: apple picking; Gloucester tide pools; Mt. Wachusett; Plimoth Plantation; Drumlin Farm; 5th graders spent 3 days at Merrowvista (an environment leadership camp); 6th graders worked at an onsite archaeological dig
- Community Service: Project Bread Spoons Project, Collected toothbrushes and toothpaste for Acton Food Pantry at the Fall Social, Collected warm clothing for children in need through Cradles to Crayons program, and Trick or Treat for UNICEF

Merriam

- At Community Day, students met in mixed grade family groups to do team-building and storytelling activities
- Cultural Enrichment Committee sponsored world renowned storyteller, Odds Bodkin
- PTO hosted a fall social with disco dancing, PTO meeting topics included 'Nearby Nature' and 'Fitness and Teambuilding'
- Community service projects: recycling, junior librarians, book swap, school store, planting gardens, and mail delivery
- This year's Theme: 'What's the story?'

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION SCHEDULE

Important dates for parents/guardians of children entering Kindergarten in September 2010 (5 years old on or before September 1, 2010).

GENERAL MEETING*

Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Personnel, Director of Pupil Services, Principals, Registrar, Kindergarten staff and School Nurse will be on hand to answer questions.

Tuesday, January 12 at 7:00 p.m., Parker Damon Building Cafetorium
immediately followed at 8:15 by K-6 Before and After School Programs Overview

SCHOOL TOURS

All schools will be open for tours on: January 20, February 2, 8 & 24.

Please call individual schools after January 4, 2010 to reserve tour times. You may reserve more than one tour per day. If school is canceled/delayed on a tour day, parents should call to reschedule.

Tour hours for Conant, McCarthy-Towne & Merriam: 8:45 - 10:00 a.m. & 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Tour hours for Douglas & Gates: 9:30 - 10:45 a.m. & 11:00 - 12:15 p.m.

Please do not bring young children with you on the tour.

EARLY REGISTRATION for PRIORITY ADMISSION CANDIDATES

At R.J. Grey Junior High School. Families who are eligible, or who believe they may be eligible, for priority admission status (siblings of current students, walkers), are urged to register early.

You must bring a copy of your child's birth certificate or passport, most recent physical examination & immunization record.

Tuesday, January 19: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon AND 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Wednesday, January 20: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

PARENT INFORMATION EVENING MEETINGS (all on Tuesday evenings)*

January 26, 7:00 p.m. @ Conant - Cafetorium; February 2, 7:00 p.m. @ Douglas - Cafetorium;

February 9, 7:00 p.m. @ McCarthy-Towne- Cafetorium; February 23, 7:00 p.m. @ Merriam - Cafetorium;

March 2, 7:00 p.m. @ Gates - Cafetorium

* In case of snow, ANY postponed meeting will be held the next evening

***NEW* REGISTRATION PROCESS for EXTENDED DAY PROGRAM, K-6**

Registration forms accepted February 22 - March 5 by mail or walk-in. Lottery will be held on Monday, March 8, 10:00 a.m. @ Community Education Office, Administration Building, 15 Charter Rd., Acton

***NEW* INFO SESSION FOR K-6 BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CHILDCARE PROGRAMS**

Tuesday, January 12th at 8:15PM, Parker Damon Building Cafetorium

Representatives from Community Ed Extended Day and School-based Before and After School Programs available

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

At R.J. Grey Jr. High. You must bring a copy of your child's birth certificate or passport, most recent physical examination & immunization record.

Tuesday, March 16: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon AND 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

OTHER IMPORTANT DATES

Late April School Placement & All-Day Kindergarten Lotteries held (as necessary). Notification letters sent out.

May 15 All Day K non-refundable deposit (\$430) due.

June 1 Parent-released or parent-completed Pre-K Assessment Form due at Registrar's Office, Jr. High.

July 5 (Approx. date) Schools assign students to AM or PM sessions and notify Transportation Office.

July 31 Child's medical forms (complete immunization history, physical exam completed after 1/1/10) due at school nurse's office.

August 1 September tuition for children registered in All-Day Kindergarten (\$430) due @ Community Ed. Office.

School Communications

We have three methods to inform you of important announcements:

- Latest News items are posted on the main page of the district website: <http://ab.mec.edu>
- Subscribe to the "Dismissal Alerts" email list that is used to distribute information about emergency dismissals and weather-related school closings. To join the list, send a message to: ListManager@mail.ab.mec.edu with the following text in the body of the message: subscribe ABNotify <your name>
Example: "subscribe ABNotify John Doe"
- "Connect-ED" is our automated telephone notification system which will be used to distribute a variety of school-related announcements, emergency dismissals, weather-related school closings, community events, etc.

'School Closing' Information

As usual, radio and TV stations are notified of all school closings/delayed openings/early dismissals. It's usually in time for the 6:00 a.m. newscasts in the case of no school or delayed opening. TV Channels 4, 5 and 7 and radio stations WBZ, WEIM (Fitchburg), WHDH, WRKO-AM/680 receive this information.

In addition, the Acton Fire Department will blow the ALL DAY - NO SCHOOL whistle as follows:

2-2-2-2 6:30 A.M. No School ABRSD
(grades 7-12)
2-2-2-2 7:00 A.M. No School ALL SCHOOLS
1-1-1-1 7:15 A.M. No School ACTON
SCHOOLS (grades K-6)

School Bus Safety

For parents of younger children, we recommend that if the bus stop for your child is not within view of your home, it may be wise to walk them to and from the bus stop, especially in bad weather. Bus drivers are instructed to drop children off at a safe location, taking extra precautions to ensure that kindergartners are delivered where there is a parent or guardian to receive them. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

AB Community Education News

The winter Interaction catalog arrived in homes on December 31. Sign up for classes starts Monday, January 4 at 8 a.m.

Additional Information for Parents of Young Children

AB COMMUNITY EDUCATION CHILD DEVELOPMENT PRESCHOOL

(open to all - ages 3 and 4 by 9/1/10)

Registration begins Monday, January 25th, at 8:00 a.m. in the Community Education office. Please call Teresa Gorman at 978-266-2525 to visit or for more information or see <http://comed.ab.mec.edu/extended>.

OPTIONAL ALL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

(open to residents of Acton only)

For the 2010-11 school year, an optional All-Day Kindergarten will be offered at all the schools. Parents may register for this program at the regular Kindergarten registration time. An annual tuition rate of \$4300 (\$430/month) will be charged for the hours beyond the regular Kindergarten half-day.

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS' PRESCHOOL

(open to residents of Acton & Boxborough)

The Acton Public Schools' Preschool provides an integrated learning environment where young children who are developing typically learn alongside children with special needs. Tuition is charged on a sliding fee scale. Acceptance of applications for Sept 2010 will begin on January 4th. Applications received by Feb 5th will be included in the enrollment lottery. Tours of the program are ongoing. Please call Carol Huebner, Early Childhood Coordinator, at 978-264-4700, x3268. Both morning and afternoon half-day sessions will be offered, along with a full-day class for 4 year olds. Applications and more information are available on our website: <http://ab.mec.edu/Preschool/index.htm>.

EARLY KINDERGARTEN ADMISSION

(open to residents of Acton only)

Letters requesting early admission (birthdate between 9/2/05-12/31/05) should be sent to the Superintendent of Schools, 16 Charter Road, Acton, MA 01720 by March 1, 2010. These letters should be accompanied by a check, made payable to the 'Acton-Boxborough Regional School District,' for the evaluation fee. The fee is currently \$400. (A sliding scale according to gross family income is available.) Participation in this process is voluntary, and early admission is only considered in exceptional circumstances when a child's development is highly accelerated. For more information, contact Lynne Laramie, Elementary Pupil Services Coordinator, at 978-264-4700, x3268.

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Acton Public Schools
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