

## Model for Continuous Curriculum Improvement

In our efforts to ensure that the students in Acton and Acton-Boxborough are receiving a strong, challenging, and stimulating curriculum, the districts have instituted a repeating seven-year curriculum review cycle. Curriculum review is a process that provides for the continuous study and evaluation of each content area.

Continuous improvement is one of the core values of the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools. In order to ensure that our curriculum meets the highest of standards and to maintain Acton and Acton-Boxborough's expectations for an excellent school system, we established a formal curriculum review process in the fall of 2008. The formal curriculum review process began with a focus on the visual arts curriculum, grades K-12. The review team members included teachers and administrators, this year. Next year we will continue this process with year 2 of the visual arts review, as well as beginning the first year of the review of the K-12 English/Language Arts curriculum.

Curriculum reviews and the work of our curriculum departments ensure that the essential knowledge and standards at each grade level are identified and articulated, K-12. These standards at each grade level are aligned with national and state standards. At the state level, the standards are called the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Teachers are trained in the content and pedagogy necessary for successful implementation of the aligned curricula, based on current educational research around "best practices" in education. If necessary, core and ancillary resources will be purchased to implement the revised curriculum.

In order to be successful, we must dedicate time and resources to bring professionals from all levels together to pursue best practices and current trends in teaching and learning. A critical element of any curriculum review is the support necessary to prepare our teachers to present new content to students. This professional development provides staff with support and training to facilitate the best instruction, with all appropriate media.

The goal is to ensure that our teachers use current effective strategies to provide our students with the highest quality education. During the review process, the following questions are asked and investigated: Is the curriculum effective? If not, how does the curriculum need to be changed to meet desired results? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Does the curriculum meet its intended expectations for each constituency? Does the curriculum reflect current student needs and best practices?

There are three phases for the curriculum cycle. **Phase One** includes the first two years of review. Year one, is the research phase of the self study. The expected outcome is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the present curriculum under review.

**Year One** includes:

- \* Selecting a leadership team/curriculum committee
- \* Collecting current research and reviewing best practices
- \* Mapping of the curricula to assure K-12 curriculum alignment
- \* Creating an action plan of research
  - \* Writing a preliminary action plan based on research, including:
    - \* Trends in curriculum
    - \* Role of technology integration
    - \* Discipline's mission, philosophy, and student outcomes
    - \* Correlating the curriculum with state/national standards

Teachers use this opportunity to reflect upon practices in a systematic, intentional manner; both individually and as a group activity. It is at this point that an action plan is developed.

Year two is a continuation of the review phase and an opportunity to analyze data. The expected outcome is to write or revise the program goals and identify the grade specific outcomes.

**Year Two** includes:

- \* Gathering input on the current curriculum and year one's position paper from staff
- \* Researching current trends and best practices
- \* Developing a communication plan
- \* Creating a scope and sequence and including the state/national learning standards
- \* Revising the position paper based on input and beginning to edit in order to prepare for a visiting team
- \* Inviting a visiting team to evaluate the curriculum

Faculty will review the challenges or needs, the response is formulated, and an action plan is responded to and implemented. This encourages teachers to be involved in curriculum development, program enhancements and improvements.

**Phase Two** is comprised of years three and four and encompasses the revision and implementation cycles. During year three, there is an opportunity to review and select resources. The expected outcome is to recommend appropriate tools, resources and materials for adoption/purchase, while planning for staff development.

**Year Three** includes:

- \* Rewriting curriculum documents
- \* Reviewing and selecting materials such as textbooks and software
- \* Determining appropriate student assessments
- \* Determining appropriate in-service training activities for staff

During year four, the initial implementation of the revised/updated curriculum takes place. The expected outcome is to successfully incorporate the updated outcomes/resources into teaching and classroom practices.

**Year Four** includes:

- \* Establishing evaluation criteria
- \* Communicating assessment results
- \* Implementing new curriculum in classrooms

Years three and four of the process include pilot implementations, budgetary implications for the full implementations of the curriculum recommendations, and professional development.

**Phase Three**, year five, contains the evaluation and monitoring stages of this cycle. During year five the expected outcome is to evaluate the revised curriculum for full implementation with reflective feedback.

**Year Five** includes:

- \* Evaluating and communicating results
- \* Continuing to revise curriculum as needed, based on evaluation

**Years Six and Seven** are years of maintenance and monitoring. The expected outcome is to allow for two years of implementation and continual monitoring as an opportunity to review ways in which the outcomes and resources are meeting the needs of the students.

The curriculum review process includes system-wide implementation of the K-12 aligned curriculum, additional professional development, and funding (if needed) to assure smooth implementation. Program and department evaluations are also critical components of a successful school system. Each year, we will examine several programs/departments to determine their effectiveness.

### **Update on Year One of the Visual Arts Curriculum Review**

We are delighted to report that the Visual Arts Curriculum Review Committee has accomplished a tremendous amount of work during this first year of the review process. Allow me to begin by acknowledging the hard work and many efforts of our committee members: Director- Diana Woodruff, HS faculty- Jeremy Flagg, Eliza Greene, Elizabeth MacKay, Nathan Martin, JH faculty- Amanda Correia, Holly Vlajinac, and APS faculty- Melissa Hayes, Hilary Tolan, Celia Knight, Heidi Kupferman and Ann Kress. The faculty have given expertly and unselfishly of their time and energy to this important task: This group has spent many days and hours working together collecting data, exploring the curriculum, probing issues, mapping the curriculum, conversing, and discussing varying and challenging points of view. The entire committee assembled on September 19<sup>th</sup>; March 20<sup>th</sup>; and May 15<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, various sub-committees met multiple times throughout the course of the year to pursue their individual assignments. I believe I speak on behalf of the entire group when I say that it has been an exhilarating experience for all of us. We have learned much from our collective work and from each other. We are enthusiastic about continuing our efforts in year two of the process.

The goals for year one, regarding all programmatic reviews, included the following:

- Assembling K-12 content-specific curriculum task forces and study groups.
- Reviewing Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and current local curriculum to determine alignment.
- Reviewing current resources and materials to determine the degree of alignment of curriculum and resources currently being used.
- Reviewing accomplishments or areas of challenge
- Reviewing the mapping of the curriculum, grades K-12
- Making recommendations for updated curriculum.

We have summarized and highlighted the accomplishments and findings of the Visual Arts Curriculum Review Committee for year one. The next steps will be to address: Transitions from elementary to junior high and from junior high to high school; Use of common language used both horizontally across the five elementary schools and vertically from K through high school and the creation of a clearly articulated, comprehensive, and coherent K-12 curriculum document.

In Massachusetts, the Curriculum Framework in visual arts was first published in the mid-1990s and has not been revised since then. In reviewing our present vision for the department and reflecting upon the goals and objectives of an exemplary program, the committee created the following to describe its mission and vision. This statement serves as an affirmation of our goals and the foundation for our review. It characterizes all of those elements necessary for a quality program that will serve the needs of all students. The vision is that Art is essential in a complete education. Students engage in art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics to broaden their understanding of self and community, to place the arts in an historical and cultural context, and to experience the arts as a universal form of human expression and communication.

In conclusion, we hope that you will find this helpful in understanding the status of the work accomplished by the committee in its first year. We recognize that in order to provide the best possible education for all of our students, we must be committed to continuous improvement. Curriculum and program reviews are two ways we can evaluate how well we are doing and make the changes students need.

**Susan Horn – Assistant Superintendent**  
**Diana Woodruff – Visual Arts Director**