INTRODUCTION

The 2010-2011 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 continuous improvement and in supporting all learners, we are proud of our accomplishments over the past year.

ENROLLMENT

The October 1, 2010 elementary school enrollment decreased by sixty students, from 2,623 to 2,563. Of the total number enrolled, 18 were special education students attending “out-of-district” schools – a decrease of two students from the previous October 1. Kindergarten enrollment decreased by 12 students, from 340 to 328. There were no school choice students at the elementary level, although 35 were children of out-of-town staff members.

The junior high school enrollment for October 1 decreased by 24 students, from 991 to 967, with nine school choice students. Thirteen were special education students attending out-of-district schools.

The high school enrollment increased from 1,999 to 2,034, a difference of 35 students. There were 37 school choice students at the high school – a decrease of 8 students from the previous year. Of the total number enrolled, forty were special education students attending out-of-district schools.

PERSONNEL

Staffing changes for the 2010-11 school year were affected by the June 2010 retirement of five Acton Public and eight Acton-Boxborough Regional teachers. Leaves of absence for five ABRSD teachers and four APS teachers were granted, and four APS and six AB resignations were received. The 12.8 ABRSD and 8.7 APS full-time-equivalent new teachers who were hired filled these vacancies and additional openings.
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

“It’s All About Instruction,” and it takes all of us to provide high-quality instruction to our students in every school, every classroom, every day. This message pervaded all of our work in the 2010-2011 school year, beginning with the Leadership Institute held during the summer of 2010 and continuing throughout the year in schools and departments. It also guided the initial work of the Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee as they, with input from the districts’ staff and Acton and Boxborough communities, articulated the mission and value statements for the Acton Public Schools and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

Mission

To prepare all students to attain their full potential as life-long learners, critical thinkers, and productive citizens of our diverse community and global society.

Values

As a community, we value:

- An environment that promotes social development and emotional and physical well-being for the entire school community.
- An excellent academic program that prepares all students to achieve their individual potential.
- Diverse extracurricular opportunities accessible to all students that provide for student growth.
- A community that welcomes and respects the differences among us.
- Literacy, communication and technology skills for life-long learning.
- Educational policy and resource decisions informed by research and evidence.

The following initiatives were generated at the 2010 Leadership Institute and implemented throughout the school year.

Pilot Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative: This new professional learning opportunity, a collaborative effort supported by the Pupil Services, Personnel, and Curriculum Departments, provided all educators the opportunity to conduct a peer observation guided by a protocol from the National School of Reform Faculty. Educators used this opportunity to:

- Learn about themselves as teachers, about their students, and about instruction in their districts.
- Form new questions or insights related to teaching and learning.
- Gain insight into questions they framed about their own teaching.
- Enhance their collective understanding of their practices.

Providing educators more time to collaborate was the goal of this initiative; the districts are committed to supporting the collaborative work of teachers with time and resources. At the June School Committee Meeting, the impact on student learning for this initiative was shared with committee members and the districts’ administrative teams. The Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative was just one way in which teachers shared their work and expertise this year . . .

- At ABRHS, a science teacher created the structure of a Teacher Work Group. Each group consists of four to five cross-disciplinary educators who observe each other’s teaching on one day and then meet to question and discuss their observations.
• At APS, kindergarten through grade two teachers formed a year-long study group to work with nine formative mathematics assessments and the accompanying intervention lessons.

• At the high school, calendar changes were made to allow for more department collaborative time for the 2011-12 school year.

We know our educators value this type of collaborative work, as this year's Professional Development survey indicated that:

• 80% of educators (of the 323 educators who completed the survey) felt that the district only sometimes or rarely provides ample time for colleagues to examine student work or analyze assessment in order to revise curriculum or instruction.

• 88% of respondents indicated that they would like time to work collaboratively with colleagues in their grade, department, or team.

• 90% of respondents indicated that they are somewhat to very interested in observing another teacher’s instruction as a way of improving their own.

**Draft document of “Effective Instruction”:** Throughout the year, the Leadership Institute Planning Committee continued the work on creating a document about effective instruction. The committee incorporated feedback from schools and departments into the original draft. A "preamble" was also written to explain the purpose and use of the document.

**Focus on Formative Assessment:** At the elementary level, grades 1-6, schools began investigating, piloting, and/or using Benchmark Reading Assessments and Running “Reading” Records as a means to gather information to guide instruction. As previously mentioned, formative mathematics assessments were also used in grades kindergarten through grade two. Conversations about formative assessment at RJ Grey and ABRHS took place during department meetings and resulted in some uses of this type of assessment. A session during the Leadership Institute in June 2011 focused on a Balanced Assessment Program, and next year’s district-wide Professional Development Day will focus on formative assessment as a means to provide students with feedback about their learning.

**Increase frequency of Administrators, Building Department Leaders, Regional Department Leaders, and Directors in classrooms:** The addition of Assistant Principals at the elementary level afforded Elementary Principals the opportunity to visit classrooms on a regular basis. At RJ Grey, the Principal followed a student’s schedule periodically throughout the year, attending all classes and specials, and the Assistant Principals, Building Department Heads and Directors found more time to visit classrooms. This was also true at ABRHS. At a minimum, the Principal visited all first-year teachers and was able to visit many veteran classrooms as well. The Director of Facilities was a “short-term” substitute teacher at the elementary schools. The Director of Curriculum and Assessment substituted in first and second grades and regularly met with Building and Regional Department Leaders and Directors before visiting a few classes of each discipline. The Superintendent of Schools spent a full day teaching fifth grade in an elementary school, a full day teaching social studies at RJ Grey, and a full day teaching AP History at ABRHS.

**Create a resource for teachers and administrators to collaboratively view video clips of instruction:** A “wiki-like” resource was created in Teachers Domain; it includes video clips of instruction not only in the United States but also from countries around the world, including Australia, Czech-Republic, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

**Provide information about alternative observation ideas:** This two-part goal included a presentation by Kim Marshall to over fifty teachers and the creation of a task force to begin work on
our teacher and administrator evaluation tool and process. At the 2011 Summer Leadership Institute, Kim Marshall led a session entitled “Feedback” that links educator evaluation to student learning. The progress of the task force and the MA Department of Secondary and Elementary Education’s (DESE) new evaluation process will also be shared.

Two other major initiatives were undertaken this year to support the message that “It’s All About Instruction.”

- The Teaching and Learning Committee, following the MA DESE protocol for creating such a plan, developed a District Literacy Plan. This process included assessing the current and new Common Core literacy standards, curriculum, assessments, instructional practices, and family and community involvement. Ongoing literacy goals, either in-progress or to be addressed through the FY’12 Budget, included developing consistent reading assessment outcomes, creating more developed reading assessment tools and procedures, hiring a reading specialist and developing interventions at RJ Grey, and aligning curriculum with the new MA ELA and Literacy Frameworks. Two new literacy goals emerged from the work of the committee and the results of a district-wide survey: 1] increase classroom literacy instruction for all students and 2] increase the use of assignments that include an authentic audience.

- A task force was formed to begin evaluating the structure and offerings of our professional development program to determine if it meets the needs of the districts’, schools’, and staffs’ goals. They conducted a survey in which over 300 educators responded to the strengths and weaknesses of our existing Professional Development Program. The results of this survey will inform the work of the Professional Development Summit as we work with Dr. Barry Fishman, Associate Professor of Learning Technologies at the University of Michigan School of Education.

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 is the Discover STEM event (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), a “reverse science fair” that takes place every other year. Exhibitors include engineers, scientists, technology professionals, and AB students who specialize in engineering, robotics, green energy and banking technology. Plans are underway for the 2011-12 event.

- Other annual PIP events included the 4th-grade Star Party, the 3rd- and 5th-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 joined Middlesex Bank, Enterprise Bank, and Workers’ Credit Union. All five elementary schools 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 – Seventy-three students (an increase of ten students from past year) 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. There were 25 students who completed summer internships or work at their sites after graduation.

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

In the summer of 2011, Deborah Bookis, formerly a teacher at the Merriam School and more recently K-12 Curriculum Coordinator, joined the Superintendent’s Office as Director of Curriculum and Assessment.

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 2010-2011, the position of Assistant Principal was added to four of the elementary schools; Priscilla Kotyk is assisting at Conant and Gates, and Matt McDowell is assisting at McCarthy-Towne and Merriam.

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOLS

R. J. Grey Junior High School

R. J. Grey began the 2010-2011 school year with 953 students: 475 in the seventh grade and 478 in the eighth based on October 1 data. This was a decrease of 22 students from the enrollment of October 1, 2009. 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 Parents’ Night. The survey results were overwhelmingly positive; students felt comfortable and supported, and 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 2010-2011 school year, seventh- and eighth-grade students were distributed among four “full” teams at each grade level. 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, grade seven also had a half team, with 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 120 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 2010, 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. Our test results indicated that for our Special Education subgroup we had not met the goal established for Annual Yearly Progress in the area of math. To address this specific issue, the school created a “Turnaround Team,” which was charged with examining the issue and identifying specific strategies to support students in this particular subgroup. During the year, the school engaged in a number of different strategies, including but not limited to: administering the mock MCAS math exam to ALL special education students, providing increased accuracy in identifying students in need of support; using the mock test scores to identify trends and patterns related to students who shared specific disabilities and challenges (i.e., performance of students with anxiety, with social/emotional difficulty, etc.); developing and implementing appropriate supports and remediation programs to support varied needs; implementing different models of tutoring support and incentives; and identifying and implementing specific strategies and measures during the actual administration of the MCAS exam (optimal grouping and testing environments, new accommodations for individual students).

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, “The Music Man,” 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 hundreds of 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.
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 23, 2011 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 850 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, during the November 2010 districtwide Professional Day, the faculty and staff of RJG worked with Cynthia Mata Aguilar, Senior Project Director and Adolescent Literacy Specialist at the Education Development Center (EDC), to began the process of developing a broader understanding of adolescent literacy and the ways in which these concepts can enhance instruction in all curricular areas.

At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, two veteran staff members, Susan Probolus and Sandy Egnatz, 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 2011 was comprised of 505 students; of these, 93% enrolled at four-year schools, while 5% continued their education at two-year colleges, prep and technical schools.

**Standardized Test Results:** Average SAT scores for the 2011 senior class again exceeded those of state and national populations. An increase from 92% to 93% of seniors took the SATs, well above
the state average of 89%. Our average combined score for the SAT was 1877, down 11 points from last year’s seniors and 351 points higher than the average combined Massachusetts score of 1526.

National Merit Scholarship Competition: Twelve members of the Class of 2011 achieved semi-finalist recognition; 54 others received letters of commendation.

National Honor Society: Ninety-two members of the class of 2012 were inducted into the NHS in April 2011.

National Latin Exam: In 2011, 31 students received gold medals in the National Latin Exam and seven received silver; eleven students received magna cum laude recognition, and six students received cum laude recognition.

Academic Decathlon Team: During the 2010-2011 season, the team of nine regulars and eleven alternates won the Massachusetts State Championship for the 19th time in the past 20 years. A total of 45 Massachusetts high schools competed. In addition, the team placed 9th overall in the country at the USAD National Championship.

Mathematics Team and Competitive Activities: In the 2010-2011 season, the AB math team finished second 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 2011 and placed second among large schools in Massachusetts. They then competed in the New England Association of Mathematics Leagues Competition in May 2011 and placed first among large schools in New England.

In addition to the team competition, eight students were finalists in the Massachusetts Mathematics Olympiad exam – Xiaoyu He with a perfect score, as well as Nihal Gowravaram, Leo Shapiro, Eric Tao, Alan Chiao, Martin Ma, David Fin, and Sinan Zhang. In the National AMC, twelve students placed in the top 10% nationwide, and two of these – Xiaoyu He and Alan Chiao – advanced to the 3rd level of this competition: the USAMO (United States of America Mathematics Olympiad).

Speech and Debate: The team, composed of over fifty students from grades 9-12, competed in twelve local and national tournaments. Students participate in a variety of events, ranging from student congress to dramatic interpretation and poetry reading; all team members prepare original pieces and research relevant topics to present and be judged at tournaments. Competing in the Massachusetts Forensics League and the Massachusetts Catholic Forensics League, the team is matched against teams from schools across the state and consistently places in the medal rounds. The team’s top competitors also compete at Harvard University’s Speech and Debate Invitational, the National Forensics League National Qualifying Tournament, and the Catholic Forensics League National Tournament.

Athletics: During the 2010-11 school year, participation in athletics remained consistent, with over 1,800 students in grades 7-12 taking part. League Championships were won by boys’ cross country, field hockey, girls’ soccer, boys’ basketball, gymnastics, boys’ indoor track, softball, girls’ tennis and boys’ spring track.

In the fall season, field hockey was a north divisional finalist. In the winter, girls’ ice hockey was a state finalist in a game played at the TD North Garden and gymnastics were crowned the north divisional champions. Boys’ indoor track won the 4 x 800 NE Championship; the boys also captured the 4 x 400 state championship. The girls’ basketball team was a divisional finalist in yet another contest held at the Garden. In the spring, softball won the division 1 north championship; boys track
were state class A champs; tennis and baseball both were divisional finalists. Individual athletes also were highly recognized: Janis Konkle (gymnastics), state individual gymnastics’ champion, placed 2nd at the national championship. Curt Owen (track) was the 800-meter state champion. Chris Pulleritis (track) won the state 400-meter intermediate hurdles championship. Nithila Asokaraj [tennis] won the north individual tennis championship. Elizabeth Belanger (girls’ basketball) scored the 1000th point of her career in March.

Proscenium Circus: This student drama group at the high school functions as a teaching and working theater. In addition to offering outstanding professional instruction in technical theater, acting, movement, scenic design, scenic painting, costume design, hair and makeup, playwrighting and stage management, PC produced 23 outstanding award-winning shows throughout the year. The productions for the 2010-2011 year included the fall play, "Witches," by Roald Dhal; Urinetown “The Musical” was the winter production, which won six awards at the Theater At the Mount Competition, including best director, best choreography, best ensemble, and three acting awards. The semi-finalist play for the State Drama Guild was "Alice in War," written by local playwright Steven Bogart. In addition, AB actors won both first and second places in the scene competition and second place in the monologue competition of the State Drama Guild. Rounding out the year were the competitive class plays and the festival of 10-minute plays.

Peer Leadership Program: Peer Leadership had another very successful year. Peer leaders facilitated alcohol/drug awareness programs in Acton’s elementary schools. They also assisted in a smoking cessation program, accompanied middle school students to Project Wellness, and continued to work toward expanding peer leadership into Blanchard Elementary School in Boxborough. The student board is experienced and confident, and Peer Leadership has a strong cohort of students who actively support substance-free living.

The School Newspaper: The Spectrum, published five times during the school year, includes articles and photography of interest to the ABRHS community. Its staff of approximately forty students complete all tasks involved in producing the paper, including writing, editing, photography, layout, and copy editing. The Spectrum is almost entirely financially self-supporting through advertising and contributions from the PTSO.

Student Council: This primary student government group consists 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 publishes 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 consideration 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 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.

**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: Chris Caro, Ken Davidson, Maya Hardimon, David Mulcahy, Devansh Shah and Diana Watson.

**Career Exploration Activities:** Beginning in November, approximately 115 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 180 students attended each of the three events. Seventy-two 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, speakers who visited classrooms, and a website listing employment opportunities.

**Senior Community Service Day:** On April 29, the Class of 2011 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 seventeenth year that the senior class has 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 eleventh Community Service Awards Night on January 17, 2011. At this ceremony 655 students received recognition for their volunteer efforts.

**PUPIL SERVICES**

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District received the results of the Department of Education’s Coordinated Program Review where the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts were commended for having a significant and positive impact on the delivery of educational services for enrolled students. Specific to Pupil Services, the following areas were evaluated during on-site visits that occurred during the fall of 2010: Special Education, English Language Education (ELE), Civil Rights, and Other General Requirements such as health education, counseling and psychological services, and more.

The Essential Health Grant (ESHS), in its fourth year of funding, has provided leadership and resources for the Health and Nursing Department. SNAP continues to be the electronic record-keeping system of choice for the health and nursing department and has been integrated seamlessly into all schools. SNAP allows building-based nurses to gather required statistical data regarding a range of health issues and, most importantly, allows building staff to meet the on-going (and often new) medical needs of students in a coordinated way. The health and nursing department has developed a specific website and offered on-line Life Threatening Allergy training to all district
staff. Funding further allowed for extensive professional development and an increase in medical equipment and technology.

Now in its tenth year, the Acton Public Schools Integrated Preschool (IPS) is a well-respected early childhood option within the community. Children with identified special education needs and those who are developing typically are educated side-by-side in this setting, meeting required IDEA regulations pertaining to inclusion in the least restrictive environment. The growing number of students with special education needs, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorders, is a current area of focus, and expansion may prove necessary to meet the district’s growing needs in this area.

Special Education Departments at both Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional consist of special educators, speech/language specialists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists – a cohesive group of talented and dedicated staff. Educational and therapeutic disciplines communicate regularly, and highly effective services are provided. Each department has developed long-range goals that are thoughtfully integrated with district goals and provide direction for the departments. Individual departments are highly organized, providing a continuum of services across all elementary schools.

Regarding counseling and psychological services, all building-based departments continue to work as a team to meet the academic, social-emotional, and career goals of students. Counseling groups are extensive and available to address topics such as divorce, adoption, substance issues, chronic illness, and social skill development. Parent evenings are offered across schools; some examples include stress management, bullying prevention, and promoting respect, as well as college planning and financial aid.

Pupil Services continues to place the highest value on student achievement and respects that each child has a unique set of skills for learning. In this regard, classroom teachers, specialists and clinicians have worked closely together through the “Teacher to Teacher” initiative. Mutual understanding of the needs of students with disabilities, as well as English Language needs, have improved communication and opportunities for increased inclusion and participation in regular education settings. Focused development on learning strategies for literacy and math have also been emphasized. Many professional development opportunities are available to keep staff current in their practice; these include a variety of updated training for cognitive and academic assessment and service delivery.

Parent outreach and communication within Pupil Services continues to be paramount, ensuring that open dialogue between parents/guardians and the school is accomplished through the compilation of targeted workshops that address a range of student needs. In this regard, the 5th Annual Parent Workshop Day focused on stress management and bullying prevention and intervention. The OnTeam Communique, written by the Director of Pupil Services, continues to be a viable mechanism for communication. The SpEd PAC is an integral part of the Pupil Services organization, offering parents/guardians resources and family support. Specifically, the PAC has worked to provide practical information regarding special education regulations, home activities, summer camp ideas, and transitional guidance.
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, and the Quincy Christmas Parade (where they took 1st place overall). The ABRHS Chorus travelled to Costa Rica and performed an exciting and rewarding concert tour where they had an opportunity to sing in various schools and beautiful performance venues! 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 an outstanding talent show, traditionally known as “Cabaret.” Twenty-two of our student musicians from band, chorus and orchestra were selected to perform at the MMEA Eastern District Festival held in January; thirteen 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, “The Music Man,” had a terrific run of performances with a huge cast of approximately 80 students involved. Twenty-eight 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, ABRSD students (41 high school and nine junior high) received a total of 50 state-level awards. These awards included: sixteen Gold Key Awards, fourteen Silver Key Awards, and twenty 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.

One ABRHS senior was one of three students in the country who received $1,000 Creativity and Citizenship Scholarships awarded at the national level of the Scholastics Art and Writing Awards. This student also received a Gold Medal Award for a painting, which was exhibited at the World
Financial Center Courtyard Gallery in Lower Manhattan in June. Gold Medals are awarded to the most outstanding works in the nation. Gold Medal and Scholarship winners were honored at a ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City in May.

One ABRHS junior who applied to Art All-State at the Worcester Art Museum was selected for the program. This AB junior was one of 145 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. 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 “Eclections,” which was held at the Acton Memorial Library in April.

The photography work of Acton-Boxborough students 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 three of an 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 Bruce Weigl’s work. One student’s artwork was chosen for the broadside design, which was printed in a limited edition.

Students in Modern Art History, Advanced Drawing/Painting, and Junior/Senior Portfolio classes visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in the fall. Students and their teacher chaperones traveled by bus for this one-day field trip.

During March, Acton and Acton-Boxborough student artwork was exhibited in the annual Youth Art Month Show at the Worcester Art Museum. Thirty-nine 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-12 and representing all the schools, was in the exhibit, “Things,” 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-six 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 third year of a curriculum review. High School and Junior High Art faculty completed revision of units of study for Visual Arts courses, grades 7-12. Elementary art faculty collaborated on developing common units of study in drawing, painting and sculpture for grades K-6.

At the elementary level there was a K-6 Art Show at Gates School in May and Grade 6 Sculpture Shows at both McCarthy-Towne and Merriam Schools in June.
TECHNOLOGY

The Department of Educational Technology (EDTech) was created in 2010-2011, with the hiring of Amy Bisiewicz as Director, to combine infrastructure, data management, and desktop support services with on-site technology integration and instruction to meet the needs of all members of our learning community. Understanding that learning powered by technology can help transform education, the department now looks to ensure seamless integration of technology into the curriculum while enabling all students with the 21st century skills needed to compete in our global society.

2010-2011 Educational Technology S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Under the direction of the Superintendent, all departments annually create S.M.A.R.T. goals that are presented and voted upon by the school committee. The goals are aligned with district-wide curriculum objectives. The complete set of S.M.A.R.T. goals is online at http://www.ab.mec.edu/curriculum/goals.shtml. In June, departments submit their results, which are used to assist the school committee in the yearly evaluation of the Superintendent's performance.

“It’s All About Instruction”

In aligning with the Superintendent’s message, “It’s all about instruction,” technology leaders actively participated on the 2010-2011 Teaching and Learning Committee to define effective instruction, create a shared understanding of teaching and learning, and determine literacy goals. Within this collaboration, measurable, long-term technology goals were established and communicated to the learning community.

GOAL 1: Enhance the student-learning environment to ensure 21st-Century readiness for every student. OUTCOME: By 2012, 85% of all students will meet the updated version of the Massachusetts K-12 Technology Literacy Standards, which incorporate the recommendations of the Partnership for the 21st-Century Skills Standards.

GOAL 2: Ensure that all teachers are proficient in the use and integration of technology into instruction. OUTCOME: By 2013, at least 85% of district staff will have participated in 45 hours of high-quality professional development that includes technology skills and the integration of technology into instruction.

To help meet these projected outcomes, the department set forth on a yearlong assessment to help determine future strategies and planning.

Technology Integration and Literacy

Using 2009 assessment data, teachers from both school districts reported having successfully integrated technology into performing daily operational and administrative tasks, with 100% reporting daily computer use to perform such tasks as lesson planning, communications, and/or collaboration.

Although all teachers did identify using technology on a daily basis, data collected from the district-developed Teacher Technology Self-Assessment surveys demonstrated various proficiency levels among instructional staff in both districts. In the Acton Public Schools, 15% of teachers identified themselves at the early technology level. Fifty-five percent of the teachers felt they were developing their technology skills, while 25% were proficient. Only 5% of the teachers felt their technology skills were categorized as advanced. In the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District,
5% of teachers felt that they were at the early technology level. Thirty-five percent of staff identified with having developing technology skills. Proficiency level of skills was identified in 50% of the staff, with 10% indicating an advanced level of technology skills.

While there has been measured progress, there is still work to be done in using technology for instructional purposes within both districts. For the Acton Public Schools, 23% of instructional staff reported using instructional technology with students on a daily basis for activities such as research, multimedia, simulations, data interpretation, communications, and collaboration. Forty-seven percent reported using technology on a weekly basis, while the remaining 30% utilize technology monthly. Acton-Boxborough reported 50% of instructional staff using technology on a daily basis for instructional purposes. Twenty-five percent of the staff reported using technology either on a weekly or monthly basis. For both districts, there were no teachers that reported having never used technology at some point during the school year.

Student Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Literacy
The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District performed a technology literacy assessment based on the 2007 ISTE NETS-S standards for students at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School and Raymond J. Grey Junior High. Out of 80 high school seniors who took the ETS iSkills assessment based on the seven skills areas: Define, Access, Evaluate, Manage, Integrate, Create, and Communicate, 79 test takers completed the test. Overall, students from both schools performed above state average on all of the competencies, with full results disclosed in the 2010-2013 technology plan (http://ab mec.edu/departments/technology/pdf/2010technologyplan.pdf). The results demonstrate that students are acquiring 21st-Century skills. However, results from informal student surveys report dramatic inconsistencies in the overall use of technology throughout their K-12 learning experience, as teachers utilized technology to varying degrees. Addressing this issue is pertinent in order to meet expected outcomes as determined by the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Operational Efficiencies
On October 16, 2010, Department of Energy Resources Commissioner Phil Giudice joined local and state officials to present six communities, including Acton, with Green Communities grants, which fund projects to reduce energy use and costs. The grant provided the districts with an energy adviser who helped to assess the technology carbon footprint of the department. In conjunction with the district’s “Power Down!” initiative, the department worked to modify current desktop configurations and help minimize energy consumption. Desktop computers were set to automatically shut down monitors when not in use; night-time backup processes and anti-virus scans were rescheduled to daytime events; and a print assessment was completed to help analyze annual spending on toner, paper, service, and maintenance. The department looks forward to more collaborative opportunities with these groups to further enhance our energy efficiency.

IT Hardware/Software Standards and Purchasing
Looking to consistently provide updated technology to staff and students, the department reviewed and updated the technology standards to meet district, business, and classroom requirements. As the proliferation of cloud-based, Internet services continued to grow in 2010-2011, the department approved cost-effective netbooks as an additional model for purchase, providing more technology resources at a lower cost. High school and junior high students can expect to have increased access to technology in the 2011-2012 school year.
Cyberbullying and Internet Safety

Our school community is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all members of the learning community. Our students are digital natives; however, we cannot assume they completely understand responsible online behavior. In 2010, the department supplemented each school’s unique K-12 bullying programs with cyberbullying and online safety curriculum materials. Using i-Safe (www.isafe.org), a research-based publisher of media literacy and digital citizenship, our districts were able to meet state mandates and provide teachers with robust instructional tools.

Department of Educational Technology Staff

The Acton Public Schools and the Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools share an infrastructure maintained by the department. Among the staff are the full-time positions of Director of Educational Technology, Systems Administrator, and Data Information Manager; part-time positions include desktop support technicians, technology integration specialists, administrative support, and the webmaster.

In 2010, the technology team supported more than 1,700 cross-platform computer devices, 15% of which were older than five years. Each Desktop Support Specialist supported 187 computers in the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District and 379 computers in the Acton Public Schools. The districts’ Technology Integration Specialists provided school-based support, with each school having 19 hours of dedicated instructional technology assistance. Both districts are working towards meeting the recommended staffing guidelines per the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/techplan/07-10guidelines.pdf). Both districts utilized PowerSchool Premier for their student information system and E-Sped for their special education needs, both of which are hosted off-site. These tools provided scheduling, attendance, grading, and reporting tools essential for efficient school administration.

At the beginning of the 2010-11 schoolyear, Amy Bisiewicz was appointed as the new Director of Educational Technology for the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools.

SUMMER SCHOOL

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Summer School had another successful year in 2011. With our enrollment of 510 students, we served ten fewer students than in 2010. Eight 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 2010) not currently enrolled in the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

Summer School course changes included the addition of an art course and the addition of a middle school math preparatory course: Math Counts. The low enrollment of the Elementary Program collapsed the three elementary classrooms into a single class. This in turn decreased the number of AB faculty positions to 18 from 21 in 2010.

The number of student scholarships increased by 7% from 2010. Increased need for financial services directly from the SS program came as a result of other community outreach/ camphership programs not having the resources to meet the increasing community needs.

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, grades 1-12 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.me.edu and advertised in INTERACTION, the course catalog that is mailed four times a year to over 20,000 area homes. More than 10,000 students enroll in classes annually.

Extended Day: Serving 298 Acton families, Extended Day offers quality before- and after-school care for 366 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.

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 weeklong sessions to an average of 88 children per week in grades K-6. 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 childcare programs that include field trips and enrichment activities. Community Ed. recently added one-day programs on the school districts’ annual staff professional day, to assist parents needing childcare on that non-school day.

Youth Basketball League: Over a 12-week period almost 900 boys and girls in grades 3 and up participate in weekly practices and league play. More than 150 paid and volunteer coaches, timers, and referees staff the league.

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

Pool & Field House Programs: Located at ABRHS, the Pool & Field House Program provides the public with opportunities to use the high school pool and field house 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, Softball, 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**

The School District managed to fund several capital projects over the 2011 summer after completing a very efficient fiscal year. Through the implementation of a productive energy conservation and education program and the successful planning and implementing of a sound capital project program, we have seen a steady reduction in our energy spending. This has created budget capacity that has contributed to the Districts’ ability to fund end-of-the-year turn backs to free cash and E and D, as well as critical technology and other curricula tools and our own much-needed capital maintenance projects.

There were two major projects at the High School: the new Field House gym floor and extensive pool work. These projects bring additional benefit to the community through Community Education recreational offerings and certainly enhance the experience of our student population. The pool got a major facelift in that we drained it and gave it an acid wash; we even had our vendor ground out all the 25-year-old grout and re-grout the surface. It came out great, as did the new gym floor that speaks for itself as soon as you walk in.

Other capital projects included the completion of the rebuilding 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 create a much more functional entrance into the Gates School, enhancing access and appearance. As always we had an eye on energy, and with the assistance of NSTAR we were able to change all of our outdoor lighting on campus to high efficiency induction lighting. The lighting looks cleaner; ongoing maintenance is reduced four times; and electrical consumption is drastically reduced. In fact the project pays for itself in a single year.

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 2012