

PTSO News

February 2006
Volume 19
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Newsletter of the Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools Parent-Teacher-Student Organization

RPTSO Web Site: <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/>

FROM THE CHAIRS:

Beth Petr – ABRHS Co-Chair

Jan Couch – RJGJH Co-Chair

Dr. Carolyn Imperato, Wellness Coordinator for APS and ABRSD (K – 12) presented at our January PTSO Forum. “Wellness” is the promotion of emotional, social, and physical health.

The new AB Wellness Website has a wealth of valuable information and can be found at <http://ab.mec.edu/wellness/wellness.shtml>. The site’s goals are to provide information about:

- The school system's Wellness departments.
- Issues that face our students' development.
- Resources in our schools and in the community.

The Wellness Website also lists monthly events, helpful tips, on-line resources, Websites and books.

Dr. Imperato talked about the **Youth Risk Behavior Survey** which will be administered in school to 6th and 8th graders and all high school students this year. Surveys occur on "even" years, and results are available in "odd" years. The school district administers the YRBS in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Education, Emerson Hospital and five surrounding communities. The goal is to identify targets for health education curriculum and instruction. The primary questions are "what are the needs in the community that should be addressed?" and "are existing programs effective in answering these needs?"

Survey topics include: Personal Safety, Sadness, Depression & Suicide, Drugs & Alcohol, Body Image, and Sexuality (8th grade & high school students only). New topics are always considered and may soon include internet safety, bullying, stress, and oral sex (high school students only).

Dr. Imperato also talked about three current Health/Wellness issues that parents/guardians should be aware of:

The “**Choking Game**” involves self-asphyxiation-choking of yourself or someone else to produce a high. Kids use belts,

ropes, shoe strings, bear-hugs, etc to stop the blood flow to the brain, thereby causing a feeling like a “high.” This may also make the person pass out. Once the pressure is released, he or she may feel a “rush” as blood enters the brain again. Anecdotal research and reports estimate that kids as young as 10 have tried this. There have been no reported incidences of it at our schools at this time.

Each episode can cause permanent brain damage and harm the retina of the eyes. During this “game,” a child who is alone can accidentally fall from losing consciousness or die. If played alone, no one is around to relieve the pressure once someone passes out. There have been several incidents of pre-teens and teens dying from engaging in the “choking game” alone. Warning signs include: unusual marks on your child’s neck, red or swollen eyes, complaints of headaches, collection of plastic bags, ropes/shoelaces/strings with unusual knots in them, sudden and frequent need for privacy. Children often don’t think this activity is harmful because they are not “doing drugs” and it is not sexual.

Prescription and Over the Counter Drug Abuse is increasingly an issue. These include: Painkillers (OxyContin, Darvon, Vicodin, Demerol), Sedatives (Valium, Xanax), and Stimulants (Dexedrine, Ritalin).

According to The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (The Partnership for a Drug-Free America) (PATs) April 2005 release:

- The abuse of prescription and over the counter drugs is behind marijuana and inhalant use (more than use illegal drugs).
- About 1 in 5 teens report using Vicodin.
- About 1 in 10 teens abuse OxyContin.
- About 1 in 10 teens have tried Ritalin and/or Adderall without a doctor’s order
- 1 in 11 abused OTC cough medications to get high.

Painkillers and sedatives can lead to addiction and dependence. Look for staggering, slurred speech, drowsiness, dilated eyes, vomiting, etc Stimulants can lead to compulsive use, high blood pressure, and irregular heartbeat.

ABRHS NEWS

FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Steve

■ **Community Service Program** – I am pleased to announce that 547 of our students qualified for community service awards this year by performing at least 25 hours of volunteer service during 2005. These students reported a total of 53,222 hours of volunteering during 2005! At our sixth annual Community Service Awards Night on January 16 we recognized those students with at least 100 hours of service. Students with between 25 and 99 hours of service will be recognized at class assemblies during the next few weeks. During January, February, and March, groups of students will participate in community service projects developed through our Martin Luther King Service Initiative. On January 11th and 12th, a Volunteer Opportunities Fair at all lunches gave students an opportunity to pick up information about volunteering and to sign up for MLK projects. We are very proud of our extensive A-B community service program.

■ **Recognition** – The following students have been selected recently to receive the Principal's Recognition Award for service to school or community: Celeste Wilson, Patricia Karakachian, Mary Li and Andrea Baum. Nominations for this award from students, faculty and others in the community are always welcome.

■ **Course Planning** – Report cards for second term will be distributed to students on February 6. Students in grades 9 through 11 will also receive the *Program of Studies* for 2006-07 that day in order to begin planning their courses for next year. Course selection will take place in early March. Parents are encouraged to review course options with students so that students make appropriate choices for next year.

■ **MCAS** – All students in Massachusetts must pass the MCAS English and mathematics tests in order to qualify for a high school diploma. Students in the Classes of 2006 and 2007 who have either not passed the English and/or mathematics tests or have not taken the tests, should be scheduled for the retest during the week of February 6. Any member of these classes who needs to take the retest and has not already been contacted by a counselor about the retake should contact Susan Serino, Chairperson of Counseling, at (978) 264-4700 ext. 3430 or sserino@mail.ab.mec.edu.

■ **MCAS Spring Grade 10** – The schedule for spring MCAS testing is listed below. For additional information please contact Susan Atwater-Rhodes, Assistant Principal at 264-4700 ext. 3405 or Susan_Atwater-Rhodes@mail.ab.mec.edu.

March 28 – March 30
ALL grade 10 students
English Long Composition and English Language Arts tests

May 23 – May 24
ALL grade 10 students
Mathematics tests

May 25 – June 2
US History and science (biology or chemistry)

Donovan

■ **Local Scholarships** – Applications for local scholarships will be distributed to all seniors through their English classes on February 7. The Chairperson of our Scholarship Committee, Jane Starr, will be stopping by each class to explain the scholarship process and the necessity of filling out the form to be considered for any of the local scholarships. The applications must be turned in to Mrs. Groener in the Counseling Center no later than March 9. This is a firm deadline. The local Scholarship Ceremony will take place on Tuesday, May 30th at 7:00 p.m.
– Steve Donovan

From the Academic Support Center

Our many wonderful Peer Tutors have devoted an entire semester working with students in the Academic Support Center, and staff and students remain very grateful for their commitment and excellent work ethic. We recognize those who have helped: Alexandra Azzolino, Victoria Blanca, Isobel Brown, Sam Burke, Varun Chalupadi, Lee Dietterich, Matt Finley, Molly Greene, Alison Herdeg, DeDe Horvath, Diane Hwang, Jyoti Jasrasaria, Rashmi Jasrasaria, Laura Jenkins, Val Kravis, Anton Li, Jeffrey Marrion, Garry Margolius, Kelsey Meidell, Andrew Musacchio, Hilary Nicolson-Gross, Matt Nittman, Louisa Paine, Kate Pellegriti, Danielle Raad, Nicola Rentschler, Emily Reuman, Jeff Shane, Ben Taylor, Alan Wang, Rebecca Wang, Ty Wilson, Patrick Wu, and Sarah Zhang. – Jacalyn Starr

Academic Assistance for Students

The Academic Support Center, located in Room 242S, offers assistance with homework completion, development of study and organizational skills, test taking strategies, and more. It is a quiet environment staffed by adults and approximately 35 Peer Tutors. The Peer Tutors have been trained to work with their peers in a variety of subjects, and are eager to help. Please encourage your son or daughter to avail themselves of this valuable resource. Contact your child's school counselor, or Jacalyn Starr, the coordinator of the program, if you have specific questions or want more information.

42nd Street Musical

Tickets for this year's High School Musical, "42nd Street" are selling fast and are expected to sell out prior to show time. Directed by Linda Potter, this Tony-award winning show set in 1933 is the story of a new Broadway musical, a hard-nosed director who needs a hit, the cast who need their jobs, and a chorus girl who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Musical direction is by Jeanie Furlan and choreography by Melinda Samperi. Songs include: "Lullaby of Broadway," "We're in the Money," "Shuffle Off to Buffalo," and "42nd Street." The show will run Friday and Saturday, Jan. 27, 28 and February 3, 4 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, January 29, at 3:00 p.m. A snow date is reserved for February 5. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for students and senior citizens, and are available at: www.MKTix.com, Roche Bros., West Acton Market, and Tedeschi Market on Rt. 2A.

Oral Sex is an issue that Dr. Imperato said many kids “treat casually”. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, “slightly more than half of American teenagers ages 15 thru 19 have engaged in oral sex, with females and males reporting several levels of experience...” The data also indicates that many young people, particularly from middle and upper middle white families do not consider oral sex serious.”

A Journal of Pediatrics article from April 2005 reports a Survey of 580 9th graders indicated:

- Almost 20% had engaged in oral sex – 18% of males and 20% of females
- Teens “believed that oral sex is more acceptable than vaginal sex for adolescents their own age in both dating and non-dating situations”
- “Oral sex is less of a threat to their values and beliefs.”
- They also believed that oral sex was less risky than sexual intercourse

Reports from local pediatricians indicate a significant increase in STDs of the throat and mouth, particularly in females. The doctors have been concerned about this risky behavior for years.

What can adults do about any of these serious health issues?

- Communicate – be open to discussions and questions.
- Give information – facts, risks.
- Use outside resources as needed – pediatricians, counselors, etc.
- Be involved in your child’s life and know what is going on
- Support self-esteem and confidence.
- Help with peer pressure.
- Talk about dating behavior.

The Wellness Coordinator consults with professionals throughout the school system and reports to the superintendent's office. Collaboration with community agencies is also important to provide the resources and information that support the well-being of the students and their families. Students and families can contact the Wellness Coordinator, Dr. Carolyn Imperato, with questions, concerns, or workshop ideas via email cimperato@mail.ab.mec.edu or by calling 978-264-4700.

The next PTSO Forum will be Tuesday, February 14th at Noon in the Acton Memorial Library. Our speaker will be Assistant Superintendent, Susan Horn. We hope to see you there!

Beth and Jan

Recognizing Preadolescent/Teenage Depression and Anxiety

Wednesday, February 8th

7:00– 9:00 p.m.

R.J. Grey Library

- What are the symptoms of depression and anxiety in youth? It may not look the same as it does in adults.
- How can you tell the difference between moods that are normal and moods that may be an indication of a more serious problem?
- How prevalent are depression and anxiety disorders in this population?
- If you think you may possibly have a child who needs professional help, where do you start?
- What causes these disorders? How are they treated?

These and other questions will be dealt with in this forum. An AB student will be a guest speaker and provide insights into these disorders by sharing her personal story – struggles and triumphs. Dr. Carolyn Imperato, Wellness Coordinator and former R.J. Grey school psychologist, along with Dr. Cathy Schen, a local psychiatrist, will lend their expertise to the presentations and also answer questions from the audience. Co-sponsored by RPTSO, CAFY, Junior High Staff, and NAMI.

Book Group for Adults

Please Join Us!

This book group series is for adults who are interested in understanding **what makes our boys tick** and learning how to help them become the men we want them to be. You are welcome to attend any or all of the book groups. We will meet to discuss books on the following schedule:

The Wonder of Boys by Michael Gurin

April 12

7:00–8:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library

Real Boys by William Pollack

May 31

7:00–8:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library

Although the entire book is important, this book group will focus primarily on Part One and Part Two of the book.

Please contact Dr. Carolyn Imperato, Wellness Coordinator, via email cimperato@mail.ab.mec.edu with any questions or concerns.

To receive notices regarding these and other programs on a timely basis, please join the PTSO e-mail loop.

To sign up, please go to:

<http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/getinvolved.htm>

RJGJHS NEWS

FROM THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Larry Fliegelman and Megan Hatt

As the third term of the school year begins, students at R.J. Grey have made connections to our school community in various ways. Teachers have helped students become a part of their teams through academics and team activities. Many students have participated in sports, intramurals, and extracurricular clubs. Several school-wide events and service learning projects have provided ways for students to connect to our school and the larger community.

■ Community Service Learning Projects

So far this year, students have participated in several community service learning projects. Student Council sponsored a pajama drive to benefit people displaced by hurricane Katrina. The 8 Orange team organized the annual Walk to the Food Pantry. A large part of our student body took part this event by carrying cans of food and other items to the food pantry in West Acton. 7 Green once again organized the Coats for Families Drive. This year's collection set another record for the number of coats donated by our school. 8 Gold ran the Toys for Tots collection in December. Other teams and Student Council will sponsor service learning events throughout the school year.

■ Team Field Trips

Each academic team has participated in at least one field trip. All seventh graders visited the Christa McAuliffe Center at Framingham State College where they participated in a simulated space mission and attended a show at the planetarium. Eighth grade trips included hikes to the summit of Mt. Wachusett and a visit to Minuteman Technology High School to learn about the school's programs and course offerings. We thank all of the parents and guardians who helped to chaperone these trips.

■ Concerts and Spelling Bees

January was a busy month with the end of the second academic term for students. Families had the opportunity to see the culmination of weeks of practicing as the bands and choruses presented their Winter Concerts. Congratulations to Mark Hickey, Bob Specian, and the members of the seventh and eighth grade bands, choruses, and the Jazz Band for their excellent performances. The Annual Spelling Bee was held on January 11. Our school winner goes on to the Northern Middlesex Spelling Bee in March.

■ Upcoming Events

Planning is well underway for several up-coming events. Our annual ski trip to Waterville Valley will take place on Saturday, February 4. World Language Week will be March 6-9. The annual Project Wellness Day will be held March 15 for our seventh graders and their families. All seventh grade families have received information on this conference. Rehearsals are continuing for the musical, "Honk," which will be presented the first two weekends of March. Many students are involved in some aspect of this production. We hope to see many of you at RJ Grey in the weeks ahead.

RJG Project Wellness Volunteers Needed

Please take the time to review the list below to find ways in which you can contribute to this important event.

- **"Day Of" assistants** – Wednesday, March 15th; 7:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. An essential group to the day's success. Final set-up, directing parents and students to proper locations and general running around. Consider coming with a friend and we'll team you up together. The second parent of a 7th grade student can also volunteer. You can meet with your child at lunch and observe PW programs.
- **Copying** – Can you or your place of business assist in the duplication of materials? We need assistance with runs of 550-1000 copies (letter size) per job. If you can help, please contact me. (Primarily during first 2 weeks of March).
- **Program Materials Set-Up; Mon., March 13, 9:30am-12:30 p.m. @ RJG** – Volunteers needed to assemble materials.
- **2007/2008 Project Wellness Steering Committee** – Positions open for the 2007&2008 Project Wellness Steering Committee include Fundraising coordinator(s) and Facilities Coordinator(s). Positions involve regularly scheduled committee meetings beginning in the fall of each school year and continue until the actual event (Every 2-4 weeks for 1-1.5 hours). The majority of work can be done at home with a computer and phone. Most of the systems and procedures have been developed with all current steering members willing to train any all future members. If you, or you and a friend, would be willing to take on a 2 year commitment to this very important activity, please contact me and I will provide you with more information. **To volunteer or for more information**, please contact Jan Couch at jccouch@comcast.net

Book Group For Families of RJG

Mother-daughter pairs are welcome to attend any or all of the book groups. We will meet to discuss books on the following schedule:

Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
January 30th from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library

Queen Bees and Wannabes by Rosalind Wiseman
March 15th from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd
May 3rd from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library

*Mothers includes guardians and other female adult family members.

Please contact Dr. Carolyn Imperato, Wellness Coordinator, via email cimperato@mail.ab.mec.edu with any questions or concerns.

Regional School Calendars

High School Dates of Interest

February

Feb. 1	Science Midyear Exams (also January 31)
Feb. 2	National Job Shadowing Day
Feb. 3– 4	Musical – “42 nd Street”
Feb. 6	Homeroom – Report Card and Program of Studies distribution
Feb. 7	Freshman class assembly 2 nd period
Feb. 8	Senior class meeting 3 rd period
Feb. 9	NAEP standardized testing for selected seniors
Feb. 10	Semi-formal dance sponsored by Student Council
Feb. 20–24	Winter Recess
Feb. 27	School Council Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Mar. 1	PCR Day (students make course choices for next year)

Junior High School Dates of Interest

February-March

Feb. 1	Student Council Meeting, 12:22 p.m.
Feb. 14	School Council Meeting, 7:00–8:30 p.m.
Feb. 16	Blue and Gold Day
Feb. 20–24	No School–Winter Break
Mar. 1	Student Council Meeting, 12:22 p.m.
Mar. 3&4	Junior High Musical, 7:00 Pp.m.
Mar. 5	Junior High Musical, 1:30 p.m.
Mar. 7	Pan Choral Concert, 7:00 p.m.
Mar. 10	No School, Professional Day
Mar. 10&11	Junior High Musical, 7:00 p.m.
Mar. 12	Junior High Musical, 1:30 p.m.
Mar. 13	Midterm Reports Mailed
Mar. 14	School Council Meeting, 7:00–8:30 p.m.
Mar. 15	Project Wellness–Grade 7

SCHOOL COMMITTEE NEWS

FROM THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Michael

J.

At its January meeting, the Regional School Committee received the final report on the ABRHS building project, which was the crowning culmination of an enormous effort put forth both by taxpayers and volunteers over the past eight years. The Building Committee, chaired by Lees Stuntz, was commended publicly for its tireless efforts overseeing the construction of the Parker Damon Building and the renovation and expansion of the R. J. Grey Jr. High and the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. These facilities will provide the citizens of Acton and Boxborough with buildings for educational and community use that should serve the towns well for the next 50 years.

However, the remaining structures, Douglas, Gates, Conant, and the former Merriam School building, which houses certain administrative offices as well as the soon to open Danny's Place teen center, will need maintenance and repair in the upcoming years. George Frost, Deputy Superintendent and JD Head, Director Facilities, provided the Committees with an extensive Capital Improvement Plan, including roof and boiler replacements, which the towns will need to fund in the next few years.

Additionally, Superintendent Bill Ryan presented the FY '07 budget and what struck many of us was the following: **"...not counting choice (currently 52 students), since 2001 we have 344 more students (24%) increase, but we are offering the same number of class sections (at ABRHS) as we were offering in 2001."** Acton and Acton–Boxborough combined have the second highest student-teacher ratio in all of Massachusetts. The total proposed operating budget at the Region is up 4.23%, and 7.54% at the local, driven largely by SPED tuition, health insurance, and utilities.

Coppolino,

Chair

As chronicled in recent newsletters, Acton's Chapter 70 proposal continues to gain momentum throughout the State, as local school committees have approved formal votes supporting an increase in the "funding floor". Recently, Lincoln, Sudbury, Maynard, Nashoba Regional, Littleton, and Concord, among others, have voiced their approval for this proposed increase in State funding.

Additionally on January 12, Acton school officials, as well as Senator Pam Resor and Representatives Cory Atkins and Jamie Eldridge, hosted a meeting with State Senate Chair of the Education Committee Robert Antonioni, at which they expressed directly to the influential legislator the rationale behind their proposal. On January 18, school and town officials attended a large rally at the State House, spearheaded by Chelmsford, Stoneham and Acton. And on January 30, a meeting was held at the RJ Grey JrHS auditorium with local area officials including superintendents, school committees, selectmen and State legislators whose towns would benefit from an increase in State aid. Please voice your support directly to State officials to bolster these efforts.

The next A-B Regional School Committee meetings will be February 2 and March 2, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. in the R.J. Grey Jr. High School library. Please contact me, as well as other school committee members, via phone or e-mail at any time. All of our contact information can be found on the District website at: <http://www.ab.mec.edu/about/members.shtml>.

– Michael J. Coppolino
Chairman, Acton-Boxboro Regional School Committee

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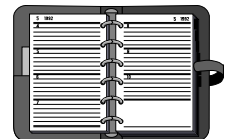
PTSO News
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School
Acton, MA 01720

Tuesday, February 14th
PTSO Forum

Assistant Superintendent
Susan Horn

12:00 Noon
Acton Memorial Library

PTSO CALENDAR



February 14 Noon

PTSO Forum

Assistant Superintendent Susan Horn, presenting
Acton Memorial Library

March 14 Noon

PTSO Forum

Acton Memorial Library

April 11 Noon

PTSO Forum

Acton Memorial Library

JOIN THE PTSO EMAIL LIST! Sign up at <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/>

THE DEADLINE FOR ARTICLE SUBMISSION FOR THE MARCH NEWSLETTER IS FEBRUARY 8.

This issue is scheduled to be mailed to families on February 16.

Articles for consideration may be sent to BPetr@verizon.net or JCCouch@comcast.net.