

## The Changing Faces at ABRHS and RJGJHS

### Embracing our Enthusiastic and Exhilarated (but Exhausted) New Teachers

Continuing to fulfill the "deep-dive" goal into a topic thought to be of prime interest to our parent/guardian population, this edition of InFocus looks to study changes in our teaching staff. Feedback is always appreciated. Please email any topic you would like to see explored to <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu>. Thanks. — Dawn Gomez

By Beth Petr

What runs through parents' minds when they learn that their child has a "new" teacher? One mother reported, "I was talking with some parents of high schoolers, and when I said, 'My son's teacher is new this year,' there was a collective 'oooh...' and a few eyebrows of concern were raised." Despite a bit of fear of the unknown and of inexperience, parents realize that our new teachers have come through a rigorous application process and have been chosen from many highly qualified and enthusiastic candidates to work with our children and become part of our community.

#### Why focus on new teachers?

New teachers are our children's—and our world's—educational future. As many more veteran teachers retire in the next few years, and others change careers, the number of new teachers being assimilated into our schools is climbing. In last month's *Lamp-lighter* newsletter, Director of Personnel Marie Altieri noted that in our kindergarten through grade 12 school systems, "40% of

our teaching staff have been newly hired in the past five years."

#### What is it like to be an AB teacher in 2008?

AB Teacher Maria Anthony offered: "Imagine having five meetings each day of the week with a board of directors or an important customer.

"Your audience scrutinizes your every move, analyzes your preparation, and challenges you frequently.

"You must present feedback from the meeting the prior day while presenting information for the current day and leading to the happenings of the next day.

"At the conclusion of the day, you must evaluate what you received during the day and plan for the same meeting schedule the following day considering how to

'mix things up' to keep your client or your boss happy, to keep him engaged, and to ensure his progress.

"This is what teaching is like, and it is exhausting and exciting."

#### What kind of support do our new teachers receive during their first year?

Every new teacher in both the Acton Public Schools and AB Regional Schools participates in the state mandated 'Beginning Teacher Support Program.' Commonly referred to as the mentoring program, BTSP provides the framework to support, encourage, guide and retain new teachers. At the regional level, new teachers are paired with a colleague in their department and attend a program in August run by Chris Clinton (HS) and

### Teaching Staff Stats

Total teachers (approximately) ABRHS = 140 RJGJH = 66

K-12 Mentor Program worked with 42 new certified teachers this year; 36 last year.

New Teachers:	ABRHS	RJGJH
07-08	16	8
06-07	17	1
05-06	15	5
04-05	12	2
03-04	5	3

A "new teacher" is any teacher new to ABRHS/RJGJHS. This could be someone right out of school, someone changing schools or careers, someone returning to the work force, etc.

Current teachers with fewer than 3 years	ABRHS: 42	RJGJH: 12
3-15 years	ABRHS: 76	RJGJH: 43
15+ years	ABRHS: 22	RJGJH: 11
Possibly retire in the next three years:	ABRHS: 12	RJGJH: 8

(Data from Personnel Director, ABRSD)

Chris Mohn (JHS). Chris and Chris help ensure that the mentor/mentee relationship continues through the first year by arranging support with the department leader, coordinating meetings outside of the department with school administration and several system-wide mentoring workshops. Mohn further elaborated that “the program is kicked off with an Au-

***“Teachers who have taught elsewhere say that it is true that the student load here is a bit higher, but that the caliber of the student body—both academically and personally—makes this a better place to teach than many places with lower class sizes.” — a veteran AB Teacher***

gust orientation followed by four to five other gatherings throughout the year. Classroom management, home/school communication, professional licensing, supervision and evaluation are the topics to be focused on this year.” She noted that beyond topic discussions, there is time for socializing and connection as well. “We have several opportunities for casual socializing which include department hosted breakfasts, gatherings at a faculty member’s home, and a cookie swap to name a few.” (See the box to read the program goals.)

At the high school, a series of new teachers’ meetings supplement the mentoring program with varying themes from teaching and learning in a diverse environment, special education, building relationships, and administrative issues and procedures.

Clinton said: “As one of the New Teacher Induction Program Coordinators, we are working with about 45 new teachers (K-12) this year. If I could characterize these teachers in two words they would be exhilarated and exhausted.

“Exhilarated, because of the professional and supportive climate of the school administration, parents, and staff. AB is noted by new staff as having a rich and supportive teaching and learning climate. Exhausted, because the learning curve for this district can at times require climbing ropes and crampons. New

teachers are challenged to find that balance between creating new learning opportunities that tap into the skills and teaching techniques they have developed individually and doing what was done by their predecessor or mentor. This challenge coupled with the many meetings, professional development opportunities, and the daily practice of teach-

ing, have teachers exhausted at the end of each day.”

For experienced but new to AB teachers, Steve Donovan states that the most frequent comment he receives after a first year is, “I never worked so hard, but here it is self-imposed.”

Another AB teacher comments: “I think the hardest part of being a new teacher is adjusting to the overwhelming number of things expected of you. Your job does not end at 2:18, but rather continues late into the afternoon, and most definitely at home every evening and weekend. There is never a time when you can feel like you’ve really gotten on top of things. Most of us teach five classes a day, and usually we teach three different preps (courses or levels). So in my case I see over 130 students per day.”

#### **What kind of support would new teachers like more of?**

At ABRHS, more intensive mentoring by a skilled veteran teacher is something that many new teachers would appreciate. Experienced teachers often feel a professional duty to act as mentors to newer teachers but may not be able to take on the additional responsibility every year. Mentors are given a small stipend for their participation and maintain their own challenging teaching assignment of approximately five classes and 115+ students.

One teacher said: “The best thing that AB offers is its mentoring program. As a protégé and as a mentor, I have found this experience to be great. The protégé is free to talk to the mentor about anything related to the job, and the mentor is usually dying to share this information. We want our newest teachers to be successful and we try our hardest to provide them with every resource necessary.”

Another veteran AB teacher added: “...The first year is always overwhelming because first year teachers have to actively think about every little thing they do; they haven’t had time to build up any automatic responses. It seems like every form is new, every discipline issue is new, every topic is new, etc. Everything takes longer.... Little mistakes end up costing huge amounts of time. The little things that one does in September have a huge effect (good or bad) in classroom atmosphere and attitude in March.

“As a community, we have very high expectations, and that translates into a

### **BTSP Program Goals**

- To provide non-evaluative and confidential support to teachers new to the Acton Public and AB Regional Schools
- To help beginning teachers learn to manage the challenges common to all new teachers
- To acclimate new teachers to the cultures of our schools and districts
- To discuss curriculum expectations, available support, and professional development
- To enhance the teachers’ professional skills through reflection on their practice and on student learning
- To retain skilled, highly-qualified teachers in our schools
- To fulfill the obligation to pass along teaching knowledge, enthusiasm, and expertise to the next generation of teachers

few extra headaches for teachers new to AB. Because of the extremely high expectations, the overall pace in the high school is pretty hectic, and there is not a lot of time for reflection or even catching your breath."

#### **What can parents do to be supportive if their child has new teachers?**

Another teacher added: "The best thing a parent can do is to treat a new teacher just like any veteran teacher.

"The fact that they're new to AB doesn't make them any less professional. Most of us went to school to be teachers and we're doing what we love in the best way we know how. If you have a concern about your child's progress in class, call or email us. Don't immediately go over the teacher's head to an administrator. Teachers want their students' parents to be informed and involved."

Yet another teacher offered: "And if you hear your student talking about something fun from class, or they seem excited about something, a quick note to that teacher can make his or her day. We usually hear only bad things, so it's nice to hear if we're doing something good.

Teacher Maria Anthony stated: "There is much joy in watching a student learn

or in hearing that a student has adopted a new 'favorite book' or seeing one master a new skill, and all teachers strive for these moments, but confidence in one's teaching skills is never immediate, and second-guessing one's self is common.

"Advice I have to parents and to students who have new teachers is to respect that teacher's preparation; to work to partner with teachers, not against them, to ensure a student's individual success; to approach a teacher in a constructive and professional way in order to raise or resolve any issues, and to know that teachers do have as a priority every student's best interests.

"Only with experience comes significant skill, and if schools did not hire new teachers, then where would we be? New teachers offer wonderful energy, new teaching strategies, and varied skills; we should embrace our new teachers and commend them for the wonderful jobs they are doing...."

So, THANK YOU to our new teachers for choosing ABRHS and RJGJHS, and to our veteran teachers for sharing their experience and expertise with them. The families of the PTSO wish you much success and welcome you to our schools and our community!

***"Parents of freshmen probably see stresses of first-year transitions in their kids as well—it takes everyone a year to figure out how to work efficiently."***

— a veteran AB Teacher

#### **About being a new teacher**

- New teachers work constantly and often feel overwhelmed by the various expectations held by students, parents, and colleagues. They face societal stereotypes about teachers—the mistaken notion that teachers end their work day at 2:30.
- New teachers are willing to try new ideas and techniques and evaluate them, but encouragement is always welcome.
- New teachers are not always aware of resources available to them in the community.
- New teachers need some degree of nurturing in their work environment. They know that AB is not the only place in the world that has excellent schools.

— an AB veteran teacher

## **School Committee Response**

**A**s parents, School Committee members share the same concerns as other community parents. We want the school district to attract and retain the best teachers so that our children can succeed in the future. The programs that have been implemented by the district, departments, and the teacher's union to acclimate new teachers in our culture are great beginnings.

I strongly agree that school teachers, like any employees, need feedback not only from management (the school administration) and mentors, but from parents too. The feedback should be constructive with the goal to improve how

our teachers teach our children.

One of the biggest ways the School Committee impacts a teacher's experience within the district is by voting the budget. With the budget we essentially determine class size and the number of sections each teacher will teach. Based on 2006–2007 information from the Mass. Department of Education (the latest from the DOE), the student/teacher ratio for the AB Regional School District is 17.1 to 1. The ratio is the fourth highest in the commonwealth. The committee agrees that this ratio is higher than we want it to be. This year the School Committee has closely examined how we can

reduce class size. We have had discussions with principals Steve Donovan and Craig Hardimon to add classroom teachers at the high school and a half-section at the junior high school. It will not resolve the student/teacher situation, but it will improve it. The School Committee is committed to continuing its work to reduce class size and thus provide a better teaching environment for our teachers.

As always I invite and encourage you to attend our monthly School Committee meetings. On behalf of the AB Regional School Committee I wish everyone a healthy and successful 2008.

— Bruce Sabot, AB Chairperson

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

# INFOCUS

**Newsletter of the Acton-Boxborough Regional  
Schools Parent-Teacher-Student Organization**

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School  
Acton, MA 01720

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- ***PTSO's "focus" publication***
- ***Check inside for pull out calendar***
- ***See <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu> for upcoming PTSO-sponsored forums***

## PC PRESENTS "BRIGADOON"

It may be winter in Acton, but inside the auditorium it's spring in Scotland as Proscenium Circus prepares for "Brigadoon." This classic Broadway musical is set in a tiny village that only appears once every 100 hundred years. This family-friendly show is directed by Linda Potter, with musical direction by Jeanie Furlan and choreography by Christine Campbell. **Performances are February 1, 2, 8, 9 at 7:30 pm and February 3 & 9 at 3:00 pm.** Tickets are \$17 for adults and \$12 for students and seniors. They are on sale now at Roche Bros and MKTix.com (no service charge added). For further information, visit [ABDrama.org](http://ABDrama.org).

## PROJECT GRADUATION WHAT IS IT & HOW CAN I HELP?

For the past 18 years, ABRHS undergraduate parents, with tremendous support from the community, have produced AB's Project Graduation. This graduation all-night "lock-in" is exclusively for ABRHS seniors. Designed to provide a safe, fun, alcohol-free and drug-free way to celebrate this important milestone, the event is always a huge success; almost 90% of the senior class attends. Preparations for this year's event have already started! Committee help is needed in lots of areas from fundraising to clean-up. If you would like to become more involved in Project Graduation 2008, please contact Shaila Golikeri or Debbie Clough at [ABProjGrad08@gmail.com](mailto:ABProjGrad08@gmail.com).

## COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

The high school's annual **Community Service Awards Night** is scheduled for Monday, January 21st (the Martin Luther King holiday) in the high school auditorium. Because of the large number of students qualifying for recognition, some of the awards will be presented at the January 21 Awards Night and others will be presented later in the month during the school day.

# JANUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Schedule  <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School Schedule		<b>1</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL	<b>2</b> Classes Resume  Student Council 12:22PM	<b>3</b> Regional School Committee 7:30PM  Early Dismissal 10:40AM Parent Conferences 11:30-2:30	<b>4</b> Auditorium Assembly— Period 4&5 Janet Applefeld Holocaust Survivor	<b>5</b>
	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> Faculty Meeting 2:30PM	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> Volunteer Opportunities Fair	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> SADD Activities Evening 7PM
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>  Winter Chorus Concert 7:30PM School Council 7-8:30PM	<b>16</b> Math Midyear Exams  Winter Chorus Concert Snow Date 7:30PM	<b>17</b> Math Midyear Exams	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> Community Service Awards 7:00PM  Martin Luther King Day NO SCHOOL	<b>22</b> Community Service Awards Snow Date 7:00PM  Winter Band Concert 7:30PM	<b>23</b>  Winter Band Concert Snow Date 7:30PM	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> Term 2 Ends  8th Grade Dance 6:30-8:30PM	<b>26</b> SAT and Subject Tests
<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> School Council 6:00PM  Term 2 Ends	<b>29</b> Science Midyear Exams	<b>30</b> Science Midyear Exams Grades Due	<b>31</b>		

# FEBRUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Schedule  <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School Schedule					<b>1</b> Musical 7:30PM	<b>2</b> Musical 7:30PM
<b>3</b> Musical 3:00PM	<b>4</b> Faculty Meeting 2:30PM	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> Homeroom/Report Card Distribution Program of Studies Distribution	<b>7</b> Chinese New Year Regional School Committee Meeting 7:30PM	<b>8</b> Senior Class Meeting 9:06AM Musical 7:30PM	<b>9</b> Musical 7:30PM
			Student Council 12:22PM			
<b>10</b> Musical :3:00PM	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> Romeo & Juliet performance for freshmen 10:00AM	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>
		School Council 7:00-8:30PM		Blue + Gold Day		
<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL President's Day	<b>19</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL	<b>20</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL	<b>21</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL	<b>22</b> Winter Break NO SCHOOL	<b>23</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> School Council 6:00PM	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> Drama Guild Play 7:30PM	<b>28</b> 2008-09 Course Selection Day	<b>29</b>	
					Jr. High Musical 7:00PM	