

FROM THE CO-CHAIRS: CHRIS RENZI AND JULIE MCKINLEY

You're Invited to Contribute to our Annual Appeal!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the families who have contributed to our annual drive to support the Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools financially. At the regional schools, there are no ice cream socials, no gift wrap, no book fairs, no auctions. We simply ask annually for a \$30 contribution per family.

The PTSO relies solely on your contribution of \$30 per family to:

- provide grants to ABRHS for programs such as Project Graduation & Freshmen Orientation,
- publish the ABRPTSO newsletter
- provide guest speakers in classrooms
- purchase laminators
- subsidize field trip costs
- print school newspapers
- purchase supplies for special class projects and
- support students' community service activities
- provide for cultural enrichment programs

As budgets become tighter, these additional resources become more crucial.

This year, in addition to the above items, principal Alixe Callen would like to use the PTSO grant for the high school to provide for the following:

- Counseling Department Career Breakfast Series for Juniors & seniors.
- Supplies for the HS Art Club which designs & produces murals which bring life & student talent to the hallways.
- Luncheon for the Creeley Poetry Presentation for a national known poet.
- Wish list of equipment and activities that are not covered by the school budget.

RJ Grey principal Craig Hardimon would like to use the PTSO grant for the junior

high to provide for and update the Audio Visual (A/V) equipment in the classroom and the RJG Auditorium with a digital projector and sound system. This will be a \$7,000 to \$15,000 investment in our school.

This year we have set a goal to get a minimum of **50%** participation. Currently, we are only at **24%**. If your reminder got lost in the myriad of back-to-school paperwork, it is not too late to contribute now and we are counting on it. Please help us reach our goal of **50% participation!!** You can choose to donate online or print out a donation form and mail your check in. If you think you have already contributed but are not sure, please contact Chris Renzi.

Please make your tax-deductible contribution today. The ABRPTSO is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and your donations are tax deductible.

Please help support the ABRPTSO reach OUR goal and forward this to friends.

Thank you for your support.

Chris Renzi and Julie McKinley
ChrisRenzi@comcast.net
Julie.McKinley@verizon.net

How Would You Like Your News?

Please see pull-out survey to provide feedback about PTSO communications.

Ensuring the Wellness of Our Students

By Mary Ann Ashton

Every two years the students in grades 6, 8, and 9 through 12 in Acton and Boxborough participate in a survey which assesses the risky behaviors that our students are exposed to and sometimes engage in. The survey was administered in 2008, and results from that survey will be shared with the community sometime this winter (typically in February or March). (For a link to the previous survey from 2006, see <http://ab.mec.edu/wellness/activities.shtml>.) The community's response to these surveys over the last eight years has resulted in programs, study groups, and organizations geared to equip families and students with the necessary skills to manage these pressures.

RJ Grey Junior High developed **Project Wellness** as a response to the trends in the survey. This day-long conference for all 7th grade students and one adult family member strives to pre-emptively educate students and parents about the risks that teens will encounter and helps to develop communication skills that are essential to guide families through the teen years. *This year's Project Wellness, scheduled for March 20, is in jeopardy unless additional funds can be raised immediately.* The funding for Project Wellness depends on

WELLNESS CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Alixé Callen

Reading Group for Parents: The role of stress in adolescent lives

Alixé Callen (acallen@mail.ab.mec.edu), principal of the high school, invites you to join a reading group focused on the role of stress in adolescent lives. We will read a book each month and gather to discuss the book and its implications for us as parents and teachers. Our first book will be *Doing School*, by Denise Clark Pope. It is available in paperback and can be purchased on amazon.com.

We will meet to discuss *Doing School* on Wednesday, January 28th at 7:30 in the evening here at the high school (room to be determined). Snow date is Thursday, January 29th.

Parent Forum—Mission Statement Development

As part of our upcoming accreditation process by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, we are re-examining the school's core values with the ultimate goal of renewing or revising our mission statement. Interested parents are invited to participate in a conversation/activity on this topic on Thursday, January 15th at 7:30 in the evening here at the high school (room to be determined). Snowdate is Tuesday, January 20th.

Looking ahead to 2009–10

The 2009–10 Program of Studies will be available as a web-based resource at course selection time. During the February 4th homeroom period, students will receive a list of course offerings for 2009–10 and instructions for accessing the course descriptions on the website. Second quarter report cards will also be distributed on February 4.

Community Service Emphasis in January

Plans are under way for the annual Community Service Awards Night on Monday, January 19 (the Martin Luther King Holiday). Students who have completed at least 25 hours of community service during 2008 will be recognized at this event, and many students will receive the national President's Volunteer Service Award. All students and parents are welcome to attend to help celebrate the role that community service plays in the life of the school and the community. The program will take place in the auditorium beginning at 7:00 p.m. and will be followed by a reception in Student Center East (outside the auditorium).

On Friday, January 9, during all lunches there will be a Volunteer Opportunities Fair to help kick off student volunteering for 2009. There will be opportunities for students to sign up for projects that will take place in January, February, March and April, and

information on some summer volunteer experiences will be available.

Anyone interested in more information about these activities can contact Kay Steeves at 978-264-4700, ext. 3444 or ksteeves@mail.ab.mec.edu.

Emergency Information Needed

Parents who have not yet updated their child's emergency information in PowerSchool should do this immediately. Contact Jeanne Potter in the Main Office (jpotter@mail.ab.mec.edu or 978-264-4700, ext. 3404) if you need instructions, your password or other assistance.

Daily announcements at the High School are posted on the website at <http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/>. (Click on *Announcements* to the right of *Quick Links*.) They are not emailed out as they are at the Junior High School.

School Committee News

FROM THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Jonathan Chinitz, Chair

Superintendent Search Update

The Superintendent search is well underway. Thank you to everyone who came out to support the process and to give input and share ideas at the community and staff focus groups. Also, we had a great response to our on-line survey. Glenn Koocher, our MASC search consultant, has summarized his findings in a report (posted on the school website) identifies areas of expertise and strengths our community is looking for in our new Superintendent. This document will guide the search committee during the interview process, which will start in mid-January.

ABRSC Update

During this difficult and uncertain economy, the School Committees and Administration are working towards a level service budget for FY10. We encourage you to follow the process, join our meetings, listen and be heard. It is important that as we go forward we preserve the important aspects of our District while ensuring we are sensitive to our economy and budget in the most responsible way. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jonathan Chinitz, Acton/Boxborough School Committee Chair, jchinitz@gmail.com.

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Craig Hardimon

Community Service Projects

Once again, the 8 *Green* team organized the Annual Walk to the Acton Food Pantry. The entire student body took part in this event by carrying cans of food and other items to the food pantry located now at St. Matthew's Church on Central Street in Acton. The Acton food pantry serves over 260 local area families in need and it's great to witness first-hand how our students can work to make a difference in their community!

During the month of November and continuing this month, the 7 *Green* team is conducting its Coats for Families Collection which so far has collected well over 500 clean coats for families in need this winter. Great effort for all involved and thanks to community members for donating their coats!

As more and more in our community face economic uncertainty this holiday season,

we are very proud of our December Toy Drive, led by students from the 8 *Gold* Team. We collected over 200 toys for families this holiday season and we know that these toys will be very appreciated by those families who need them most.

Finally, the students from the 7 *Red* team have enthusiastically embraced the school's Mission Statement that "we are an educational community learning to participate in a global society" by partnering with Josh Bycel, the founder and executive director of One Kid One World. Bycel's organization works to support the Lolkuniyani Primary School in the Samburu Region of Kenya, a beautiful but extremely poor and very rural area populated by the Samburu tribe. This culminated with a team dinner in November to raise awareness of, and funds for, work the team began together in September. The dinner was a great example of a meaningful school-home partnership,

as it was the 7-Red parents who took on the leadership for this event. A tremendous thank you goes out to all those involved to make this event such a successful one!

Upcoming Events

Save the Date for our 9th Annual Project Wellness Conference being held on March 18, 2009, Merrimack College for all 7th graders and their families. We are hard at work to make this an educational experience for all involved.

Once again, we will have our exciting annual ski trip taking place on January 24 at Waterville Valley. Three full bus loads of students will be hitting the slopes. We are expecting to have a great time, so let it snow!

Rehearsals are starting for our spring musical, *Alice in Wonderland*, and we are all looking forward to another wonderful spring production!

Ensuring the Wellness of Our Students

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

grants and contributions from community service agencies and from the local business community. It is funded entirely outside the appropriated school budget. While RJ Grey intends to continue to seek out permanent funding from large corporations, for this year they need the support of our community members to finance this year's spring event. We recognize that the current economic crisis has made it very difficult to give, but ask everyone to consider that the stress that adults are feeling impacts our children and their behaviors.

Donations of any amount will be greatly appreciated, and will be acknowledged in the program materials distributed to the approximately 1,000 participants. All donors are also welcome to distribute marketing materials at Project Wellness Day in March 2009. For more information, please visit our website <http://ab.mec.edu/rjweb/projectwellness.shtml> or contact Andrew

Shen, Vice Principal at 978-264-4700, ext. 3303. Contributions can be mailed to RJ Grey Junior High, 16 Charter Rd., Acton, MA 01720 Attn: Project Wellness, or paid through the link on the Project Wellness website.

ABRHS Stress Study

Faculty members at the high school formed a committee in response to their concerns about the amount of stress that students were experiencing. Headed by teachers Deborah Leavitt and Janet Maxwell, the committee distributed surveys last spring to faculty and students and held several faculty meetings to analyze the data. On the first day of school, students received a handout on ways to reduce stress (posted on our PTSO website), and the group has developed several recommendations to reduce stress around midyear exams and on PCR (Pupil Course Request) day. The

PTSO will sponsor a forum on Tuesday, February 3 at 7 p.m. where faculty members will share their work to date. Additionally, see the ABRHS news for an opportunity to participate in a book group to discuss stresses on our students.

Advice for Families When Students are Hosting or Attending a Party

Another thoughtful response to the information in the risk behavior survey was the formation of the Community Alliance for Youth (www.cafy.net). CAFY sponsors numerous opportunities for families to tackle and understand youth risky behaviors. Two years ago the PTSO worked with CAFY to develop one-page guidelines of advice for parents/guardians to consider when their student is hosting a party at home, and when a student is attending a party elsewhere. See our website to download these useful reminders.

January 19
No School
Community Service Awards

January 23
End of Second Quarter

February 3
PTSO Forum
Student Stress Management
7 p.m. ABRHS Library

CABARET

“Life is a Cabaret, ole chum. Come to the Cabaret!”
ABRHS Winter Musical, January 30–February 7

Music & Lyrics by Kander & Ebb

Directed by Linda Potter

Musical Direction by Jeanie Furla

Choreography by Christine Campbell

Set in Berlin just before the Nazis' rise to power, Cabaret explores how the political forces of the times changed the lives of the German people forever. An unforgettable story set to the powerful music of Broadway's Kander and Ebb.

- Evening performances at 7:30 pm on Fridays and Saturdays Jan 30, 31 and Feb 6, 7
- Matinees at 3:00 pm on Sunday, Feb. 1 and Saturday, Feb 7

- Adults \$17; Students & Seniors \$12
- Groups of 10 or more receive a \$2 discount per ticket
- Tickets sold at Roche Bros. after Jan 5, and are currently available at MKTix.com; sold at ABRHS during lunch beginning Jan. 26
- ABSAF, Staff and Season Ticket holders must reserve tickets at *ABDrama.org*, Jan 2–25

Due to the mature themes in this show, parental guidance is suggested; not recommended for young children. For more information, contact Susan Williams at (978) 263-3143.

Stress Management Forum **Tuesday, February 3** **7 p.m., ABRHS Library**

The high school's Stress Management Committee will hold a forum to update parents on the work of the committee. Presenters will include Janet Maxwell, co-chair of the committee; Alixe Callen, principal; Stephen Hitzrot, Counseling Department Chair; and Student Council representatives. Last spring the committee administered teacher and student surveys on student stress and has used the results of these surveys to help formulate recommendations. Some changes have already been put in place, and others are under discussion. All interested parents and students are invited to attend the forum.

JANUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School Schedule				1	2	3
4	5 Faculty Meeting, 2:30 p.m. School Resumes School Resumes	6	7 Student Council, 12:22 p.m.	8 Counseling/Freshmen Groups Early Dismissal, 10:40 a.m. Parent Conferences, 11:30–2:30 p.m.	9 Volunteer Opportunities Fair during lunches Counseling/Freshmen Groups	10
11	12 Math/ Science Midyear Review	13 Math/ Science Midyear Review Principal's Drop-in Hr., 6–7 p.m. School Council 7–8:30 p.m. Winter Chorus Concert, 7 p.m.	14 Math/ Sci. Midyr Exams No assessments in any subjectt	15 Math/ Sci. Midyr Exams No assessments in any subject Mission Statement, 7:30 p.m., ABRHS Library	16 Math/ Sci. Midyr Exams No assessments in any subject	17
18	19 Community Service Awards 7 p.m. Martin Luther King Day— No School Martin Luther King Day— No School	20 Community Service Awards SNOW DATE—7 p.m. Winter Band Concert, 7 p.m.	21 Winter Band Concert SNOW DATE—7 p.m.	22	23 Quarter 2 and Semester 1 Ends 8th Grade Dance 6:30–8:30 p.m. Quarter 2 and Semester 1 Ends	24 SATs
25	26 School Council 6 p.m.	27	28 Grades due "Doing School" book discussion, 7:30 p.m.	29 Periods 1–3, Senior Alternative Breakfast	30 8:15–9:02 Check it out/Hadassah Cabaret 7:30 p.m.	31 Cabaret 7:30 p.m.

For updated information on events, check ab.mec.edu calendars.

FEBRUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Cabaret 3 p.m.	2 MCAS Biology Test Faculty Meeting 2:30 p.m.	3 MCAS Biology Test PTSO Forum on Stress 7 p.m., ABRHS Library	4 Homeroom Report Cards and Program of Studies Distribution	5 Counseling/Sophomore Groups	6 Counseling/Sophomore Groups Cabaret 7:30 p.m.	7 ACTs Cabaret 3 and 7:30 p.m.
		PTSO Forum on Stress 7 p.m., ABRHS Library		Student Council, 12:22 p.m.		
8	9	10	11	12 Senior Class Meeting 9:07 a.m.	13	14
		Principal's Drop-in Hour, 6-7 p.m. School Council 7-8:30 p.m.		Blue + Gold Day		
15	16 Winter Break—No School	17 Winter Break—No School	18 Winter Break—No School	19 Winter Break—No School	20 Winter Break—No School	21
22	23 School Council 6 p.m.	24	25	26 PCR Day (Pupil Course Request) Counseling/Junior Groups Festival Play Performance	27 Counseling/Junior Groups	28 Festival Play—Preliminary Round
						<input type="checkbox"/> High School Schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School Schedule

For updated information on events, check ab.mec.edu calendars.

How Would You Like Your News?

Please fill out this survey from the PTSO co-chairs, Chris Renzi and Julie McKinley. Your feedback is important.

The primary purpose of our AB Regional PTSO is to “improve, provide and maintain communication channels among parents, faculty members, students, administrators, school committee members and citizens of the community and to provide a framework for promoting excellence in the R. J. Grey Junior High School and Acton Boxborough Regional High School.” The PTSO has used a monthly newsletter and e-mail communications to provide information to families. As costs have risen and our volunteer pool has dwindled over the past several years, the PTSO has transitioned from a monthly mailed newsletter, to a quarterly mailed newsletter, and now to an electronically e-mailed Weekly Chatter with a quarterly mailed newsletter.

We need your help to determine how to most effectively communicate with families. After more than two years of asking families to “opt-out” of receiving a paper copy, we still mail 1,600 newsletters each month (out of 2,300 families at the regional schools) for a cost of just under \$900 per issue to print and mail. If more families were signed up to receive electronic communications, we could consider using more PTSO funds for grants to our high school and junior high. Our e-mail communications are sent to about 1,800 e-mail addresses; the number of e-mails attached to a particular class range between 243 addresses associated with this year’s seventh graders and 444 associated with this year’s senior class. While there’s no way of knowing what percentage of families are receiving our e-mail communications, for many of you this mailed copy is our only way to communicate with you or for the school to communicate important information.

1. Do you receive the Weekly Chatter for the high school e-mailed each Sunday?
 Yes No

2. Do you receive the Weekly Chatter for the junior high e-mailed each Sunday?
 Yes No

3. What grade(s) are your child(ren) at the regional schools?
 7 8 9 10 11 12

4. Do you receive the quarterly newsletter in the mail?
 Yes No

5. Did you read the November quarterly newsletter?
 Yes No

6. What types of information would you like to have communicated to you through the Weekly Chatter?

- Changes in schedule (e.g., early dismissal, standardized testing)
- Volunteer opportunities
- School community meetings
- Student achievements
- Announcements about upcoming events
- PTSO forums, meetings
- Meetings with principal
- Back to School night
- Parent meetings sponsored by school
- Student activities open to public (e.g., student plays, concerts)
- Announcements from the principal

List topics of interest: _____

7. Do you like receiving a newsletter in the mail from the PTSO?
 Yes No

8. Are you more likely to read something received in the mail?
 Yes No

9. What types of information do you read/would you like to read in a newsletter?

- Changes in schedule (e.g., early dismissal, standardized testing)
- Volunteer opportunities
- School community meetings

- Student achievements
- Announcements about upcoming events
- PTSO forums, meetings
- Meetings with principal
- Back to School night
- Parent meetings sponsored by school
- Student activities open to public (e.g., student plays, concerts)
- Announcements from the principal
- Article from the School Committees
- Article on topic of interest

10. Do you have topics that you would like to see covered in a newsletter?
List topics of interest: _____

11. Do you have topics that you would like to see addressed with a speaker sponsored by the PTSO?
List topics of interest: _____

12. If the PTSO were to sponsor a meeting on one of the topics in which you are interested, what time of day would work best for you for a meeting?

- 8 a.m. 5 p.m.
- 9 a.m. 7 p.m.
- 12 p.m. 7:30 p.m.
- 3 p.m.

If you have not signed up for the PTSO e-mail list and would like to receive the Weekly Chatter, please go to <http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/getinvolved.htm>

Thank you for sharing your thoughts,
Chris Renzi and Julie McKinley

Please mail your survey (to the address below) or, if you'd prefer to answer the survey electronically, you can access the link at our website: abrptso.ab.mec.edu.

**Survey, AB Regional PTSO,
PO Box 912, Acton, MA 01720**