FROM THE CO-CHAIRS: MARY ANN ASHTON (HS) & JAN COUCH (JH)

What Is the Student Assistance Team?

Our November PTSO forum with Stephen Hitzrot, head of the Counseling Department, took place on November 14 as the PTSO Newsletter was going to print. We’ll provide you with more information about what Mr. Hitzrot had to say in our January newsletter, but below will provide you with some information about activities in the Counseling Department.

Student Assistance Team

Part of Principal Steve Donovan’s education report to the School Committee in October included a summary of the Student Assistance Team during the 2005-2006 school year. The Student Assistance Team (SAT), a multidisciplinary team which meets twice weekly during the school year, accepts referrals from school community members who are concerned about a particular student. The Team gathers information by examining school records, obtaining feedback from current and past teachers and administrators, and consulting the school counselor about the student’s and parent’s perspectives to better understand the pupil’s needs and to make recommendations that are appropriate and non-punitive. In some cases, students are referred to counseling supports, or may be evaluated for special education. The SAT assists students in reaching their full potential through early intervention. This year’s SAT discussed 152 students; 104 of the students were new referrals, representing a significant increase in new referrals for a school year. The remaining 48 students were “carried over” from the previous year and the team continued to monitor their progress.

Students are most often referred by teachers because of failing grades or a significant drop in academic performance. Of the 152 students, 98 students had academic concerns as one of their issues. Mental health issues, most prevalently depression and anxiety, were a concern for 41 students. These students were referred for in-school as well as community support through mental health resources and physicians. Referrals were also made for 32 students for issues involving drug and/or alcohol, as evidenced by a violation of the extracurricular chemical health policy, suspension for use or possession, or suspicion of substance abuse. Additionally, 23 students were referred for behavioral issues, which marked a significant increase in this area.

Members of the Student Assistance Team for the 2005-2006 school year included Nancy Cohen, team leader, school psychologist; Tim Malloy, special educator; teachers Liz Mackay and Abigail Buffum; Colleen McGovern, school nurse; school psychology interns Elizabeth Meade and Lauren Midon; and Susan Atwater-Rhodes, administrative liaison.

PROJECT GRADUATION
What Is It? & How Can You Help?

What It Is

For the past 17 years, ABRHS undergraduate parents, with tremendous support from the community, have produced Acton-Boxborough’s Project Graduation. This all-night “lock-in” is exclusively for ABRHS seniors. The event is always a huge success; almost 90% of the senior class attends. It begins at 10 pm on graduation night and ends at 5 am the next morning.

The night features live entertainment, games, food, prizes, scholarships, a surprise theme, and unbelievable decorations. The only other people allowed to attend are the unobtrusive chaperones, limited to undergraduate parents and community members. The program is designed to provide a safe, fun, alcohol free and drug-free way to celebrate this important milestone.

How You Can Help

Preparations for this year’s Project Graduation have already started! Help is needed in lots of areas – Theme Design & Decorations, Food, Logistics, Fundraising, Chaperones, set up, and clean up. We encourage all parents of underclassmen (grades 7-11) to participate. (Seniors’ families are not allowed!) Support the Class of 2007 now and your future graduates will have the opportunity to celebrate in this exciting and safe way.

For more information, please contact Mary Ann Ashton at 978-263-4399 or MABAshton@aol.com
Naviance
The Counseling Department has begun to use the Naviance Family Connection computer program this fall to help students with decisions about college and career opportunities, and course selections that will help them attain these goals. The program is able to track student interests, goals and achievements, and tests. For students beginning to plan for college, the program provides information about visits to AB by college representatives, transcript requests, college choices and admissions decisions, and scholarship applications.

The classes of 2007 and 2008 have been introduced to the program and have set up personal accounts with user e-mail logins and passwords. If you are a parent of a junior or senior and would like to have parent access to the Naviance program, please e-mail Andy Palmer at apalmer@mail.ab.mec.edu. Be sure to identify the name of your child in the request. A registration code will be e-mailed to you.

PTSO Information
Thank you to those of you who have sent in your $25 per family membership dues. Because of your generosity, the PTSO presented grants to the principals at our November forum: $2,000 for the high school, and a $1,000 for the junior high.

If you would like a copy of the student directory for the year, the high school directories are available for $3 each from the School Store and the junior high directories are available from the main office at R. J. Grey.

Next Forum
Superintendent Bill Ryan will speak at our next PTSO Forum on Tuesday, January 9, at noon, in the Acton Memorial Library. We hope to see you there!

From the Regional School Committee

Michael Coppolino, Chair

The Regional School Committee met on Thursday Nov. 2 and heard the annual report on the Junior High School that was presented by Principal Craig Hardimon and two students. Posed for consideration by the Committee were a draft of a Social Climate Survey, its School Improvement Plan, as well as upcoming budget considerations, including adding another half or full team. Additionally, the administration at RJ Grey is recommending a self-assessment in lieu of an outside review by NEASC or NELMS, which the Committee is considering. The School Committee also voted to hire 2.0 full time equivalent high school staff (four teachers) in January to begin the process of meeting the 990-hour requirement. Funding will come from current Chapter 70 monies.

Acton’s annual State of the Town Meeting will be held on Nov. 20 at 7:00PM at the RJ Grey Auditorium. Two major topics to be addressed include the Municipal and School’s Capital Plan, and the State’s 990-hour mandate for high school students. There will also be brief updates about the Acton Neighborhood Network and W. R. Grace. Acton residents will be receiving a booklet of information explaining each of these topics. Please consider attending to ask questions and help guide the Town in setting its priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

As always, the public is welcome to attend. All School Committee Members can be contacted at AB_School_Committee@ mail.ab.mec.edu

Acton School Committee Members:
Marie Altieri, altierim@aol.com
Jonathan Chinitz, jchinitz@gmail.com
Michael Coppolino, copp@verizon.net
Terry Lindgren, terry.lindgren@comcast.net
Sharon Smith McManus, ssmcmmanus@rcn.net
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Boxborough School Committee Members:
Brigid Bieber, tbbieiber@comcast.net
Becky Neville, neville317@juno.com
Bruce Sabot, bruce_sabot@comcast.net

Save The Date
Mark your calendars now so you won’t miss the annual high school musical, “Once Upon A Mattress,” February 2–10, 2007. Directed by Linda Potter, with music direction by Jeanie Furlan and choreography by Christine Campbell, this is the musical comedy version of the fairy tale, Princess and the Pea. ‘Mattress’ first opened on Broadway in 1959 starring, the then unknown actress, Carol Burnett, who catapulted Burnett into her career as comedienne extraordinaire.

For more information, visit www.ABDrama.org or call Linda Potter, (978) 264-4700 x3584.

Congratulations Marie
Congratulations to School Committee member, Marie Altieri, for her selection as a member of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees “All Massachusetts School Committee” for 2006. MASC’s Board selects nine individuals who “have made a significant contribution to their community or their school committee either through specific action or as an inspiration and role model for their peers and constituents.” Marie was nominated by her fellow school committee members, and received the award last week at MASC’s annual conference. Marie has a son at the high school and twin sons at Gates School.

Upcoming School Committee Meetings

DECEMBER
7 ABRSC: Thursday, December 7, 7:30 PM, RJ Grey JHS Library
21 Acton Public SC: Thursday, December 21, 7:30 PM in the RJ Grey Library

From the Chairs
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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Steve Donovan

990 Planning

We are in the process of determining how best to comply with the Massachusetts Department of Education mandate for 990 hours of structured learning time for all students while maintaining the atmosphere of our school and meeting our students’ needs as we see them. In November, I visited many sophomore and junior English classes to get student input to be used in the planning process. We expect to pilot some new courses during second semester and will also try to offer some other afternoon and evening learning experiences which students could count toward next year’s 990 hours. We will also work to quantify existing student activities for 990 credit. We believe that we can meet this challenge in a way that will be positive for the students and for our school system, and we will provide more information to parents as the planning proceeds.

Report cards

November 21 was the distribution date for first term report cards. For security reasons, these reports are printed on colored paper with a visible school seal. Therefore, any reports without the seal are copies, not originals. Any questions about a student’s grades or comments should be directed to the teacher of the course. Questions about attendance should be directed to the student’s assistant principal (Susan Atwater-Rhodes for grade 12 and grade 11 A-G, Larry Dorey for grade 9 and grade 11 P-Z, and JoAnn Campbell for grade 10 and grade 11 H-O).

Recognition

Each year the faculty nominates three students from whom the seniors select one to receive the DAR Good Citizenship Award. I am pleased to announce that this year’s recipient is Anton Li.

Senior Lauren Levine has been selected as the Acton-Boxborough recipient of the Principal’s Leadership Award. As the school award winner, Lauren is now eligible to consider for recognition at the national level in a scholarship program co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and Herff Jones Inc.

Seniors Prabhat Putchakayala and George Mossessian were recently named regional semi-finalists in the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology.

The first recipients this year of the Principal’s Recognition Award for service to school and community are seniors Doug Breuer, Alexandra Essman, Beth Gil-lispie and Kelsey Meidell.

Congratulations to the cast, crew, staff and director Linda Potter for the outstanding Proscenium Circus fall play, “Holes.” This entertaining show was a great kickoff to the PC year.

As this newsletter goes to press, many of our fall athletic teams are winding up impressive seasons. We applaud the efforts and results of all of our student athletes.

Community Service Activities

Our annual Community Service Awards Night is scheduled for Monday, January 15th (the Martin Luther King holiday), at 7:30 p.m. 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 15 Awards Night and others will be presented later in the month during the school day.

Students who have done at least 25 hours of community service during 2006 should report their hours by December 6th using the form that was distributed in homeroom in November. Additional forms are available in the Counseling Center. Everyone is invited to attend the awards ceremony to share in recognizing student volunteers.

On January 9th, the Volunteer Opportunities Fair at all lunches will kick off community service activities for 2007. Students are encouraged to stop by the tables to find out about school year and summer volunteer opportunities.

It’s a Date / ABRHS

DECEMBER
2 SAT and Subject Tests
6 Financial Aid Night 7:00 pm
11 School Council Meeting – 6:00 p.m.
12 Career Speaker Series First period
12 ABRHS Winter Concert 7:30 pm
21 Alumni Holiday Reception – 1:30 p.m. (for the Class of 2006)
25 Winter recess (through January 1)

JANUARY
2 School reopens
9 Volunteers Opportunities Fair All lunches
15 No School MLK Holiday
15 Community Service Awards Night – 7:30 pm
17 & 18 Math midyear exams
22 School Council Meeting – 6:00 p.m.
26 End of Term 2

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FROM THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Larry Fliegelman and Megan Hatt

Early adolescent students need opportunities to explore new ideas, to form new peer relationships, and to engage in a variety of physical, intellectual, creative, and social activities. Throughout the school day at R.J. Grey, these needs are met in academic classes where students acquire basic skills and knowledge. The exploratory courses, X-Block classes, and physical education classes provide additional opportunities for learning, utilizing a wide variety of individual teaching and learning styles.

Learning and connecting with members of the R.J. Grey community also happens after school, as many students participate in one or more of the extracurricular activities that are offered. In addition, there are many ongoing school-sponsored clubs and activities that meet on a regular basis at our school. These include:

**AB Blueprint**
ADVISORS: Heidi Porten
The AB Blueprint is the school newspaper/literary magazine of RJ Grey Junior High. It is published three times a year and is distributed free to all students and staff at our school. We meet every Wednesday after school in the PC lab from 2:15 until 3:30. This year the club has been so popular that the “overflow” uses the library computers.

**Mathcounts**
ADVISOR: Kaisheng Du
Students meet weekly to work on challenging math problems. Club is open to all students who enjoy math.

**Jazz Band**
ADVISOR: Mark Hickey
The Jazz Band is open to members of the band or chorus program. Auditions are called as needed. Music will be chosen from the swing band era through today’s popular music, arranged for a swing band. It will perform in two evening concerts, as well as school and community events. The ensemble meets one day a week after school.

**Chess and Board Games Club**
ADVISOR: Mike Balulescu
Students gather every Wednesday to play chess, checkers, and any other board games they wish to bring to our meetings. This club is informal and is open to anyone who would like to attend.

**Musical**
Each year, an active group of parents produce a musical, which involves many R.J. Grey students. This year’s show, “Annie Warbucks” is directed by Samantha Hamel and produced by Bonnie Maserang. Auditions are called as needed. Music will be chosen from the swing band era through today’s popular music, arranged for a swing band. It will perform in two evening concerts, as well as school and community events. The ensemble meets one day a week after school.

**Adopt-a-Grandparent**
ADVISORS: Judy McKendry, Becky Had den and Laurie Blagdon
Students make weekly visits to residents of the Life Care of Acton nursing home, forming intergenerational friendships.

**Art Club**
Advisor: Heather Pochatek
Students meet every Tuesday after school till 3:30 for various art experiences in an open studio atmosphere. Each week the advisor will introduce a new art experience. Students can choose to participate in the lesson or work on their own on a self initiated project. The art experiences include: painting, drawing, ceramics and crafts.
Speech Team
ADVISOR: Dot Keyworth and Pat Higgins
The members of the Speech Team practice on Wednesday, and participate in tournaments at area schools on one Sunday each month. The performance events at these tournaments include reading poetry or prose, reading a prepared speech, and ‘extemporaneous speaking’ where the student is given a prompt and organizes a speech on the spot.

Star Wars Club
ADVISOR: Melanie Scalise
Students meet every other Wednesday to share their enthusiasm for all things Star Wars. The club is open to all students.

Student Council
ADVISOR: Maureen Lin and Gabrielle Berberian
Elected officers and homeroom representatives meet once or twice a month during X-Block to plan activities. Participation in Student Council committees is open to all students. Some of these committees are: community connections, community service, mix-it-up, principal advisory board, publicity, recycling, school council, social, and school spirit.

Yearbook
ADVISOR: Vicki Weeks and Holly Vlajinac
The yearbook committee meets Wednesdays on an as-needed basis. Participants make posters, take photos, assemble pages, and help with sales.

As the school year goes on, we expect many more activities to be added to accommodate students’ needs and wishes. As you can see, R.J. Grey Junior High School is a busy place in the afternoons.
PTSO CALENDAR

Tues, January 9  
Noon  
Acton Memorial Library  
Superintendent Bill Ryan is our speaker

Tues, February 13  
Noon  
Acton Memorial Library

Tues, March 13  
Noon  
Acton Memorial Library

Tuesday, April 10  
Noon  
Acton Memorial Library

Thursday, May 10  
7:00 PM  
Annual PTSO Business Meeting  
(vote on board & budget)

7:30 PM  
“Surviving the College Search” presentation  
sponsored by the PTSO and Counseling Department

Are you reading this newsletter online?  
If not, check it out at http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/newsletters.htm  
From this site, you can also join the PTSO email list!

Submission DEADLINE for the February 1 Newsletter is January 16.  
Please contact Beth at BPetr@verizon.net or 978-263-7208.