It’s Budget Time!

Bill Ryan, Superintendent of the Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools, kicked off the new year’s PTSO forum series on January 9. While his comments focused primarily on the budget process for the school districts, he also touched on other issues including the continued turnover of staff, the changing demographics of each of the schools, and the need for a comprehensive capital plan focused on maintaining Acton’s elementary schools and improving technology at the Junior High. The schools have developed budgets which do not require an override this year in Acton, nor is one anticipated in Boxborough, but some fine-tuning of the budgets is required to meet the available revenues. Mr. Ryan is hopeful that the gap between expenses and revenues can be resolved as certain budget assumptions become more refined in the next month. Budget hearings are scheduled for the School Committee February meetings in the R. J. Grey Junior High Library: Thursday, February 1 for Acton-Boxborough and Thursday, February 15 for Acton Public Schools.

Mr. Ryan presented preliminary budgets to the school committee on January 4, and he walked through the key decisions that needed to be made by the School Committee at the beginning of the budget process. Working with the Acton Leadership Group and the Boxborough Leadership Forum, the schools develop budgets that fall within the available revenues, noting that the increase in Chapter 70 state aid has been beneficial to the school districts. The budgets assume that health insurance will increase 12.5 percent, and that there will be no increase in user fees, but both of these assumptions are continually being examined. Choice revenues are not expected to increase significantly: there are currently 73 students from Choice, and Mr. Ryan expects his recommendation to the School Committee will be to enroll only staff children and siblings as new students in the program next year.

As part of the budget process, the School Committee looked at the numbers of sections at grade levels, and the number of staff that should be added. This year’s budget added nine additional teaching positions to the high school, and five were added in the previous year through Choice revenues. Because of the need to comply with the DOE requirement for 990 hours of teaching, two more positions were added beginning this January, and four more positions will be added in the new budget to provide new course offerings. The budgets do not include new teaching positions for the Junior High.

Mr. Ryan stated that the leasing contract for the buses expires this year, and the district is currently accepting bids for bus leasing only and for bus leasing with drivers. He said that he had met with the current drivers to explain the situation; he believes that it may be a difficult decision, but that the district needs to weigh the possible cost savings against the quality of service provided by the current transportation department and the state reimbursement for transportation at the region. He noted that Boxborough has been satisfied with contracting for bus services for a long time, and that a decision would be made by the end of January.

The Acton-Boxborough budget will increase approximately four percent, primarily due to salaries (both new positions and salary increases), pension, and special education tuition and transportation. Because the Chapter 70 aid is expected to continue and to increase, the projected assessments for both towns have increased less than four percent. The Acton (elementary) schools budget is increasing slightly less than six percent, being driven by increases in salaries, health insurance, and utilities.

Mr. Ryan discussed the continuing turnover in administrative staff, announcing that George Frost, his deputy, will retire at the end of the school year, and that a search is moving forward for a principal for the Conant School, which is being headed by interim principal, Philip Benincasa, this year. Turnover among veteran teachers peaked a couple of years ago. He also discussed the district’s focus on the changing demographics within the school district, and the possible tension between the elementary schools’ open enrollment policy and the value for diversity within each of the schools.

In response to questions about the Douglas and Conant modulars, Mr. Ryan talked about the development of a capital plan. The School Committee has voted to move forward with purchasing two new modulars for Douglas, but there is not yet a plan for how they will be financed. Other audience comments and questions focused on the transportation plan, with one parent expressing opinion that decision-making about a bus contract should consider the quality of the Acton-employed bus drivers as much as the cost. Another parent questioned the limitation of bus passes from the Junior High, and Mr. Ryan agreed to look into it.

Our next forum will be on Tuesday, February 13 at 12 p.m. at the Acton Memorial Library. We hope everyone has a great month!
Attention: Families of Sophomores... NAVIANCE is coming your way!

Stephen Hitzrot, chair of the Counseling Department, addressed the PTSO November forum on a number of topics, including the introduction of the Naviance Family Connection program to the high school. The program is designed to help students make informed decisions about course selection, college, and career opportunities. The on-line program allows for tracking student interests, tracking goals and achievements, scheduling visits by college representatives, searching for colleges, recording college choices and admissions decisions, storing scholarship information, and communicating with students and parents via e-mail.

This year’s junior and senior classes have already received an introduction to the program and have set up personal accounts with user e-mail logins and passwords. Parents of juniors and seniors were invited to set up their own accounts earlier in the school year. Beginning in February, counselors will begin meeting in small groups with sophomores to discuss career exploration and future planning. Included in this introduction will be an interest survey that can be accessed through Naviance, and students will receive log-ins at that time. Please check the high school counseling website (http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/index.shtml) and the Counseling Communique in February for more information about this program for sophomores.

2006 YRBS Results

The Acton-Boxborough Community Alliance for Youth (CAFY, Inc.) is sponsoring a presentation of the results of the 2006 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. There will be a panel discussion of the findings followed by a question and answer opportunity.

Date: February 7, 2007
Time: 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Location: R.J. Grey Junior High School Auditorium

There will be a presentation of the YRBS results by Statistician Jim Byrne, followed by a panel discussion with pediatrician Dr. Jessica Rubenstein; Stephen Hitzrot, Chairperson of Counseling and Psychological Services for AB; Ginny Conway, Chairperson of Counseling and Psychological Services for Acton Public Schools; Dr. Carolyn Imperato, Wellness Coordinator; and Acton Youth Officer Keith Campbell.

The Department of Education requires towns to engage in local Needs Assessments to assist in identifying targets for health education curriculum and instruction. Through collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Education, Emerson Hospital and five surrounding communities, the Acton-Boxborough district administered the fourth Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to sixth and eighth grade students, as well as high school students in the spring of 2006. The YRBS collected information regarding students’ alcohol and drug use, sexual activity, emotional and personal safety, and other at-risk behaviors. Data from the surveys has been compiled to assist the Acton and Acton-Boxborough schools with planning and obtaining funding for adolescent health initiatives.

CAFY encourages all parents and community members to attend and participate in this important event!

ABNotify

The Acton Public Schools, and Acton Boxborough Regional School District offer members of the public a chance to receive notifications about emergency dismissals and weather related school closings. The email notification is not about public relations, but will only contain information about school dismissals. To subscribe, send a message (no subject) to ListManager@mail.ab.mec.edu with the following text in the body of the message: SUBSCRIBE ABNotify

RJG Project Wellness Volunteers Needed

Project Wellness is in its sixth year, and its success has been due to the support of many volunteers. Please take the time to review the list below to find ways in which you can contribute. Any time is greatly appreciated

“Day Before” set-up team—Spend a few hours (approximately 4) at Merrimack College in North Andover on Tuesday, March 13th to help set up for the following day’s event. This will occur during school hours.

“Day Of” assistants—Wednesday, March 14th; 7:15am–1:30 pm. This is an essential group for PW success involving Final set-up, directing parents and students to proper locations and general running around. 7th grade parents can assist with set-up if you can arrive by 7am. Consider coming with a friend and we’ll team you up together.

Please consider one of the following time slots:
7:15 am–1:30 pm
7:15 am–11:00 am
10:30 am–1:30 pm

Attendee Materials Set-Up—Monday, March 12, 9:00am at RJG Volunteers needed to collate and assemble materials for attendees of PW. Many hands are needed for this task. Sign in at the RJG front office where you will be directed to the assigned room.

To sign up for any of these activities please contact Jan Couch at jccouch@comcast.net

http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/
Time and Learning and NEW Graduation Requirements

As most of you know, we have been working this year to develop a plan to meet the state Time and Learning Requirements while maintaining a school atmosphere that meets the needs of our students. We view this as an opportunity to examine our school structures and course offerings to ensure that we are working to meet the needs of all students in our increasingly diverse population. Some of the concrete steps that we have taken include:

- Submitting our plan to the Massachusetts Department of Education.
- Hiring a coordinator to work with faculty and administration on the implementation of the plan. Kirsten Kunz, who has worked at A-B for a year and a half as a special education assistant, started as our “990 coordinator” in January.
- Reviewing our graduation requirements and recommending to the School Committee an increase in the number of credits required. The School Committee in December approved an increase to 90 credits for the Class of 2008 and 100 credits for the Class of 2009. Since most students currently leave A-B with many more than the 80 credits currently required, this will not have a broad impact, but it will reinforce the idea that students should take a full schedule of courses right through senior year.
- Adding some second semester courses and seminars that allow us to pilot new electives and allow current students to “bank” some hours that will count towards their course time requirement for next year, allowing them to have a free period in their schedule that would otherwise not be possible.
- Developing a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help students and parents understand the processes resulting from the changes in our plan. See the next section for this information, which is also available on our web site.

990 Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Who will track the 990 hours?
Kirsten Kunz will be the 990 coordinator and will track hours as part of her responsibilities.

2. Which after school programs will be given 990 credit?
A list of extracurricular activities which will count for 990 credit is being prepared. This will be distributed to students as part of the course planning process and will be available on the school web site.

3. What are other schools doing?
Schools are doing a variety of things to meet the 990 mandate, and many schools are still not in compliance. Schools have extended the school day, added an “X Block” before and after school, staggered students in morning/afternoon classes, added directed studies, and added more courses.

4. Who will hold students accountable for directed studies?
Attendance will be taken at directed studies, and students will only earn credit for 990 hours if they are present for their directed studies.

5. Can students meet 990 and still have one free period?
In order for students to meet 990 during the school day, they will need to be enrolled in seven periods of classes and a lunch period every day.

6. What will be the consequences if students do not attend 990 hours courses?
Students will not receive credit for 990 hours courses if they do not attend the courses.

7. How will science labs be affected?
Labs will not be affected, although the courses with one lab period per class cycle will carry 164.5 hours and those with two labs per cycle will carry 188 hours rather than the 141 hours carried by courses such as English and mathematics.

8. Will students still get credit for hours if they are absent?
A procedure similar to the current one (90% attendance) will be enacted. The
school district is responsible to ensure that each student is scheduled for 990 hours of structured learning time. It is the student’s responsibility to attend all courses to earn 990 credit hours.

9. What is the direct benefit to students? The philosophy behind 990 benefits all students in that it expects that students will be in a structured learning environment for a minimum amount of hours during the school day. Students who are already appropriately scheduled and involved with activities will very likely meet the 990 requirement. The needs of students who are currently under-scheduled and underserved at the high school will be examined as a result of 990.

10. Can students “bank” hours? Yes. Students will be able to “bank” hours from spring and summer mini courses offered in 2007 as well as hours for two semester-long courses, Animation and Musical Theater, that are being piloted this spring. Banked hours will count for the 2007–2008 school year only.

11. Will special education resource room periods count toward 990 hours credit? Yes, to the same degree as English, Sociology, Physical Education, etc.

12. What is the difference between 990 hours and credits? Credit-bearing courses are listed in the Program of Studies. Credit-bearing courses are used to meet the 90 credits required for graduation and also count toward 990 hours. A typical five credit course counts as 141 hours. Other classes, seminars, and experiences may count toward the 990 hour requirement but not necessarily toward the 90 credits required for graduation.

Course Planning
Clearly, changing the time and learning and graduation requirements will change the course planning process somewhat this year. We will maintain the schedule as originally planned but will provide students and parents with some additional information along the way.

• 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 2007–08 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 the course options with their students so that students make appropriate choices for next year.
• Information to supplement the Program of Studies will be provided during February. This information will list non-credit courses, directed study options and extracurricular activities, all of which can count toward the 990 hour requirements.

Community Service Program
We are pleased to announce that 561 of our students qualified for community service awards this year by performing at least 25 hours of volunteer service during 2006. These students reported a total of 52,968 hours of volunteering during 2006! At our seventh annual Community Service Awards Night on January 15 we recognized those students with at least 50 hours of service. During January, February and March, groups of students will participate in community service projects developed through our Martin Luther King Service Initiative. On January 9th, 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 community service program at A-B.

Local Scholarships
Instructions for applying for local scholarships will be distributed to all seniors through their English classes on February 1st. The Chairperson of our Scholarship Committee, Jane Starr, will visit each class to explain the scholarship process and the new on-line application through Naviance. The deadline for scholarship applications is March 8. It is critical that parents and students understand that only students who have completed a local scholarship application by the deadline are eligible for these scholarships. Local scholarships awarded in 2006 can be accessed by seniors through their Naviance account. Seniors needing help accessing their Naviance account should see their counselors.

The local Scholarship Ceremony will take place on Tuesday, June 5th at 7:00 p.m.

Schedule of MCAS 2007 Spring Testing
For additional information please contact Susan Atwater-Rhodes, Assistant Principal at 264-4700 extension 3405 or Susan_Atwater-Rhodes@mail.ab.mec.edu.

MARCH 20, 21 & 22
MCAS English Composition and English Language Arts
ALL grade 10 students

MAY 22 & MAY 23
MCAS Mathematics
ALL grade 10 students

MAY 29
MCAS U.S. History
ALL Grade 11 students taking U.S. History II

JUNE 5 & 6
MCAS Biology and Chemistry
ALL Grade 10 students taking either biology or chemistry
Grade 9 students taking biology are encouraged to take this test

Recognition
The following students have been selected recently to receive the Principal’s Recognition Award for service to school or community: Kelsey Soberg, Justine Schemel, Matt Finley and Dave Cronin. Nominations for this award from students, faculty and others in the community are always welcome.

— Steve Donovan

Notes from the Academic Support Center
The staff and students within the Academic Support Center are appreciative of the talent, enthusiasm and interest that the Peer Tutors bring to the program. Their support is invaluable. We
recognize and thank the following students for their work in the most recent term: Alisa Brennan, Kiki Boyles, Kate Brady, Doug Breuer, Geoff Brown, Erika Buckle, Charlotte Davis, Matt Finley, Matt Ford, Theresa Glaser, Michael Gruet, Alison Herdeg, Elyse Lebel, Andrew Lai, Anton Li, Mary (Yan) Li, Zach Luz, Bryan MacDonald, Sophie Matyas, Kelsey Meidell, Emily O’Brien, Elizabeth Olliver, Louisa Paine, Viraj Parikh, Esther Park, Kate Pellegreti, Hannah Pinsky, Jessica Poppe, Christina Proulx, Thanmayi Rachapudi, Jackie Ritter, Lauren Rodda, Katelyn Saaristo, Dipal Savla, Scott Seger, Sergy Tsitlenko, Maksim Tabachnik, Alan Wang, and Jessica Xiong.

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 peer tutors who have been trained to work with other students. 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.

ABRHS Recycling Club Active at A-B

The Recycling Club at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School takes responsibility for recycling the school’s paper, plastic and aluminum waste, part of the school’s commitment to community service. Once a week the ten to fifteen students and their advisor, Steve Singer, spend a busy hour collecting recyclables from bins in each classroom, office and hallway. The materials are then sorted for pickup. Last school year the club recycled five tons of paper, two tons of plastic and one ton of aluminum. This year Acton Ford has signed on as the sponsor for the club to help with costs of recycling pickup and the t-shirts worn by the club members when they work. For more information contact Steve Singer (ssinger@mail.ab.mec.edu).

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. The 8 Green team organized the annual Walk to the Food Pantry. The entire student body took part in 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 trips to the Museum of Science 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.

http://abrptso.ab.mec.edu/

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 10. Our school winner goes on to the Northern Middlesex Spelling Bee in March.

Upcoming Events

Planning is well underway for several upcoming events. Our annual ski trip to Waterville Valley will take place on Saturday, February 3. World Language Week will be March 5-8. The annual Project Wellness Day will be held March 14 for our seventh graders and their families. All seventh grade families have received information on this conference. Rehearsals are continuing for the musical, “Annie Warbucks,” 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.
From the Regional School Committee

Michael Coppolino, Chair

The Regional School Committee met on Thursday Jan. 4, 2007 and then again on Jan. 20 for its annual All-Day Budget Workshop. At its first meeting in the New Year, the school committee received reports on the updated ALG (Acton leadership Group) plan for fiscal ’08 as well as the current year’s budget. The Health Trust report suggested we carry a 12.5% increase for health insurance for next year, though we are hopeful that their final recommendation will lower that amount, even by 1%, freeing up approximately $100,000.

The CAFY (Community Alliance for Youth) report identified Feb. 7 as the date for a presentation and panel discussion at the RJ Grey Auditorium from 7–9PM at which time the results of the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey will be reviewed.

In addition, the Committee received an update from Steve Donovan, Principal of ABRHS on the 990 State mandate, which included a copy of the memo sent recently to the DOE, plus a phased, two-year increase in the high school’s graduation requirements. Currently at 80 credit hours, which is one of the lowest in the State, by 2009 all students will be required to attain 100 credits. The vast majority of students who have graduated from ABRHS have well over 100 credits, however raising the bar will encourage those under-scheduled to attend and complete more courses.

Lastly, and much to our chagrin, Marie Altieri, a long-standing, highly active member of the school committee announced her resignation due to work and family commitments. We will pay tribute to her years of service and accomplishments at our February meeting.

The All-Day Budget Workshop was well-attended by Acton FinCom members, as well as the general public, where budget assumptions and recommendations were presented by Bill Ryan, Superintendent of Schools, as well as principals Steve Donovan and Craig Hardimon in the morning session. The afternoon presentations covered Acton Public School needs, including a report by the District’s Capital Planning Committee, headed by George Frost, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, who will be retiring at the end of this year.

The next two School Committee meetings are annual open budget hearings which are required by law. As always, the public is welcome to attend. All School Committee Members can be contacted at AB_School_Committee@mail.ab.mec.edu.

Upcoming School Committee Meetings

**FEBRUARY**

1 ABRSC: Thursday, February 1, 7:30 PM, RJ Grey JHS Library

15 Acton Public SC: Thursday, February 15, 7:30 PM in the RJ Grey Library

Where: ABRHS Auditorium

When:
- **Evenings** — Fridays & Saturdays, Feb. 2, 3, 9, 10 at 7:30 pm.
- **Matinees** — Sunday, Feb. 3 & Saturday, Feb. 10 at 3:00 pm. General admission seating.

Tickets:
- Adults $15; Students & Seniors $10

Tickets may be purchased:
- cash or check at Roche Bros, West Acton MARKET & Tedeschi’s on 2A
- credit card at MKTix.com
- at the High School PC office, Room 103E, 9:30–2:30 weekdays
- Group rates available

PLEASE NOTE: ABSAF pass holders, School Staff, and PC season ticket holders must reserve tickets through www.ABDrama.org. Thank you.

Once Upon A Mattress

Directed by Linda Potter
Music Direction by Jeanie Furlan
Choreography by Christine Campbell

*Once Upon A Mattress* is a funny, frivolous, fractured fairy tale, loosely based on *The Princess and the Pea* by Hans Christian Andersen. It originally opened on Broadway in 1959, starring unknown actress Carol Burnett as Winnifred and has been revived several times for stage and television.

MORE INFO: Check ABDrama.org or contact Linda Potter, (978) 264-4700 x3584 or lpotter@mail.ab.mec.edu.
Project Graduation: What Is It & How Can You Help?

For the past 17 years, undergraduate parents, with tremendous support from the community, have produced Acton-Boxborough’s Project Graduation, an all-night “lock-in” exclusively for ABRHS seniors. The event is always a huge success; almost 90% of the senior class attends. The night features live entertainment, games, food, prizes, and scholarships. Common areas of the high school are transformed into such venues as a set for the show “Survivor”, a western town, “Austin Powers” or a cruise ship, and the new graduates escape to a fantasyland with their friends. The only other people allowed to attend the party are the unobtrusive chaperones, limited to undergraduate parents and community members. Seniors’ parents can get a good night’s sleep after a long day of ceremony & celebration knowing that their young adults are safely enjoying themselves.

Project Graduation Donations
Project Graduation is sponsored by the PTSO and funded entirely through donations; we receive no financial support from the school budget. Parents of underclassmen, members of the business community, and other organizations have been very generous in the past. Knowing that your child will be a senior in the not-too-distant future, please consider making a donation. Every bit helps.

SEND TO: Project Graduation, c/o ABRPTSO, P.O Box 912, Acton, MA 01720. Payable to: Project Graduation.

Project Graduation Volunteers
Preparations for this year’s Project Graduation are underway, and help is needed. We need volunteers for almost every committee. No special talents are needed, just a desire to work on this rewarding project. We encourage all parents of underclassmen (grades 7–11) to help with this wonderful and successful event. It’s a lot of fun! Support the Class of 2007 now and your future graduates will have the opportunity to celebrate in this exciting and rewarding (and safe) way. If you already sent an email, we will be contacting you soon. Chaperones are required to be CORI-approved.

To volunteer, please complete the form below. Requests will also go out via email in the next month or so. For more information, please contact Mary Ann Ashton at MABAshton@aol.com.

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Project Graduation 2007 Volunteer Form

Sign me up! I’d like to volunteer in the following area(s):

- Theme Design & Decorations
- Food Planning
- Set up
- Logistics
- Lighting
- Food Serving
- Entertainment
- Crafts
- Casino
- Challenge Games
- Photography
- Chaperone

OR

- No preference, just want to help out.

Name ____________________________________________

Phone ____________________________________________

Email ____________________________________________

Please send this form to:

Project Graduation, c/o ABRPTSO, P.O Box 912, Acton, MA 01720.
PTS O C A L E N D A R

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://abruptso.ab.mec.edu/newsletters.htm
From this site, you can also join the PTSO email list!

Submission DEADLINE for the March 1 Newsletter is February 5th.
Please contact Beth at BPetr@verizon.net or 978-263-7208.