



# **2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT**

Acton-Boxborough Regional School District



Wellness  
Equity  
Engagement

All photos provided by A-B schools  
unless otherwise indicated.

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# SUPERINTENDENT'S WELCOME

## ACTON AND BOXBOROUGH COMMUNITY,



Much of the public discussion around our schools this year was focused on the budget and appropriately so. I want to start by **expressing my sincere thanks and appreciation** to Acton and Boxborough residents for the tremendous support at both Town Meetings and in the Acton Election. This was an incredibly challenging budget and the communities have made a significant investment in maintaining a top-notch school system. Thank you!

That said, there was so much more our educators accomplished this year on behalf of our students and families. We focused on three main goals: improving social-emotional and behavioral health outcomes for students, expanding access and opportunities for students, and improving our students' and families' sense of belonging in our schools.

**We did a lot to support students' social-emotional learning.** We identified a new bullying prevention curriculum for our students K-12 and continued implementation of our advisory programs at the junior and senior high schools. This allowed us to focus on deepening connections among students and adults in the schools. We also focused on professional learning for our elementary educators to more deeply understand social-emotional competencies in students. We also continued to provide expanded mental health services to students through Cartwheel Cares.

**Academically, our elementary school focused on implementing our multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).** MTSS is a process by which educators work in teams to constantly review student assessment data and identify a variety of supports students may need to improve academic outcomes. We also began the implementation of our new core literacy curriculum. This last step in the development of our literacy program brings us fully into alignment with the best research on how students learn to read. At the high school, staff finalized a plan to realign course levels and expand access to upper-level courses for students.



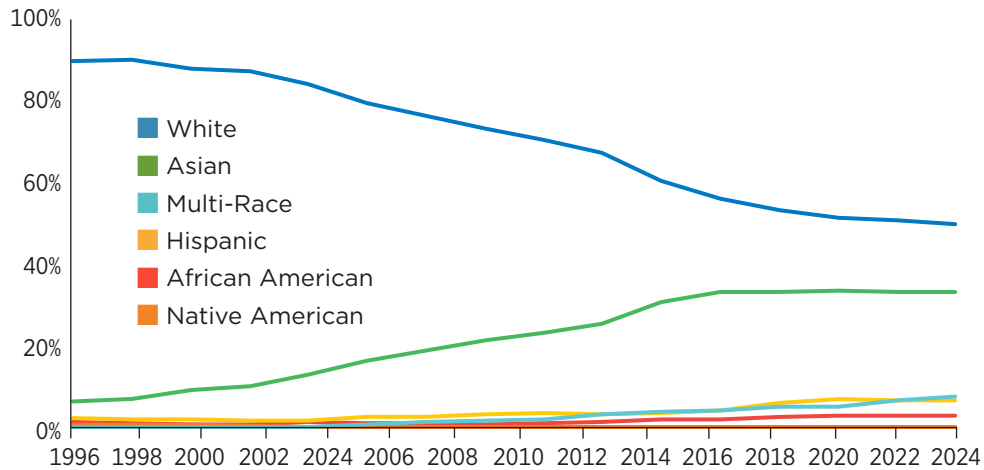
**We also continued to work with our teacher-leaders to expand culturally responsive practices in our schools,** worked with a coalition of students, families, educators, and community members to revise our protocols for responding to hate and bias incidents, and welcomed about 20 new students from Acton's Emergency Shelter. Thanks to funding from a legislative earmark, we were able to partner with the A-B United Way to open the Acton-Boxborough Resource Center and the A-B Exchange, which has helped coordinate community services for our students and families.

There was a lot for our schools to be proud of this year. I am incredibly grateful for all of the work our staff did to support our students and families!

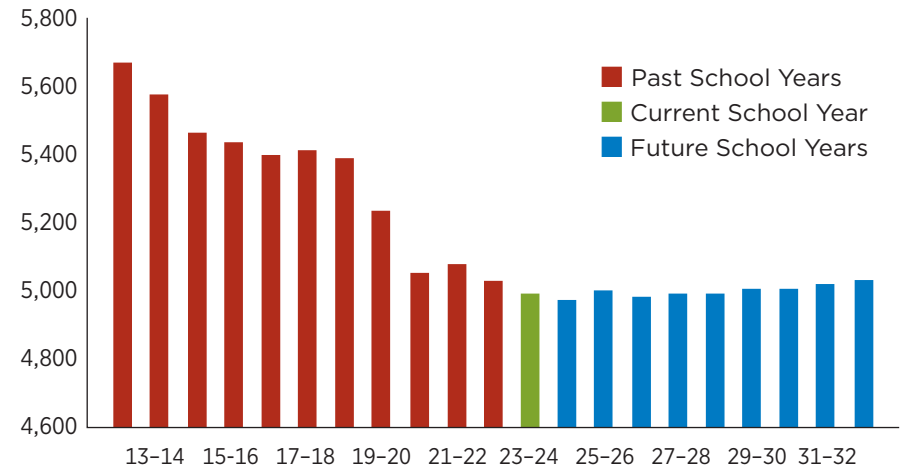
**Peter Light**  
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

# Demographics at a Glance

## Student Population by Race, 1996–2024



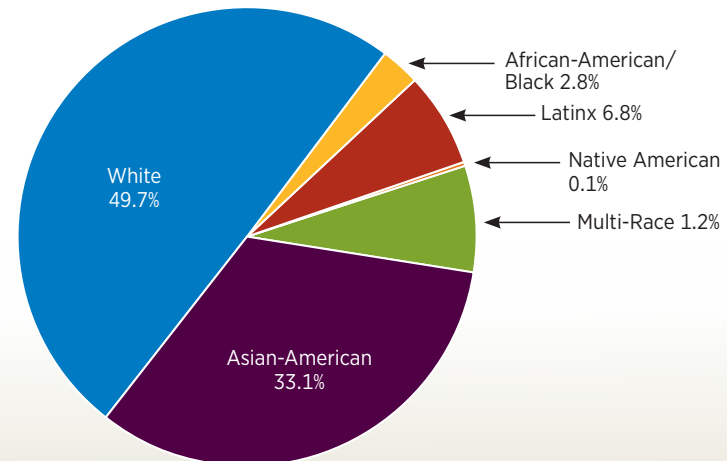
## Enrollment—Actual & Projected, 2013–2032



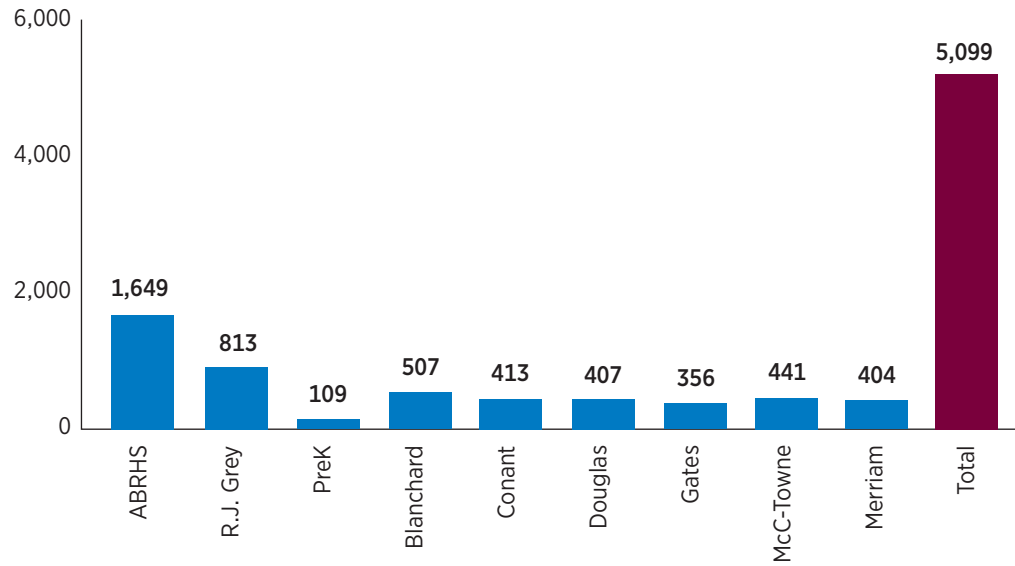
The charts and graphs included on this page are intended to provide you with a general overview of our student and family population during the 2023–2024 school year. Where helpful, we have also included data that provides perspective about the change over time that Acton-Boxborough has experienced in terms of the demographics of our continually evolving community.

Please note that the graphic that illustrates the shifts in our student population by race between 1996 and 2024 comes from the Cleargov.com website. If you are interested in reviewing the information that is highlighted by Cleargov about our district, please visit: <https://cleargov.com/massachusetts/school/acton-boxborough>.

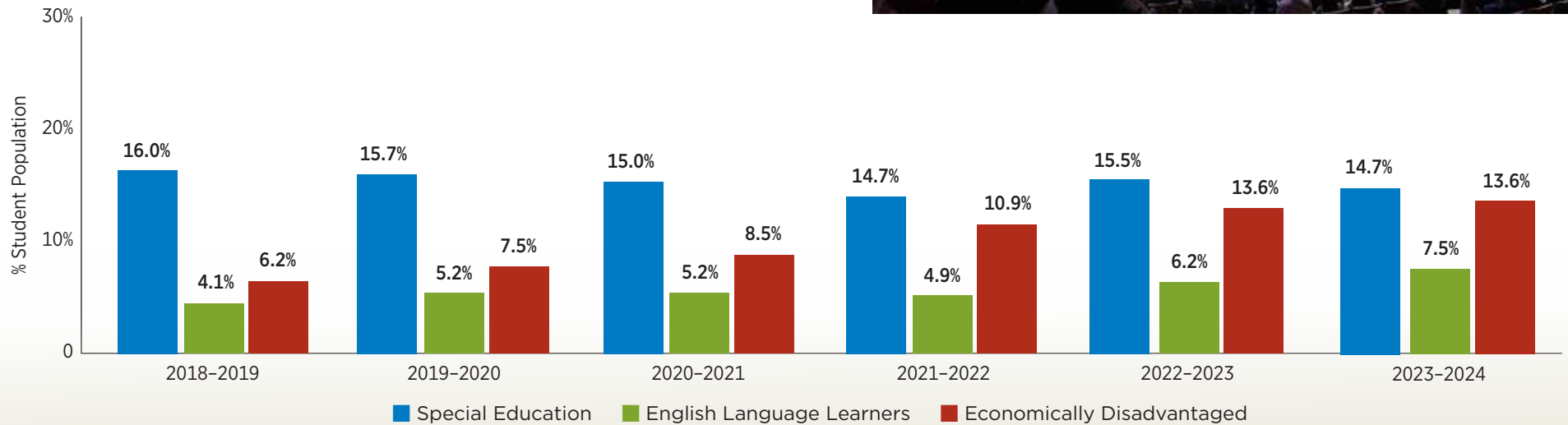
## 2023–2024 Student Enrollment by Race



## 2023-2024 Enrollment by School



## Student Sub-Group Populations 2018-2024



# District Finances at a Glance

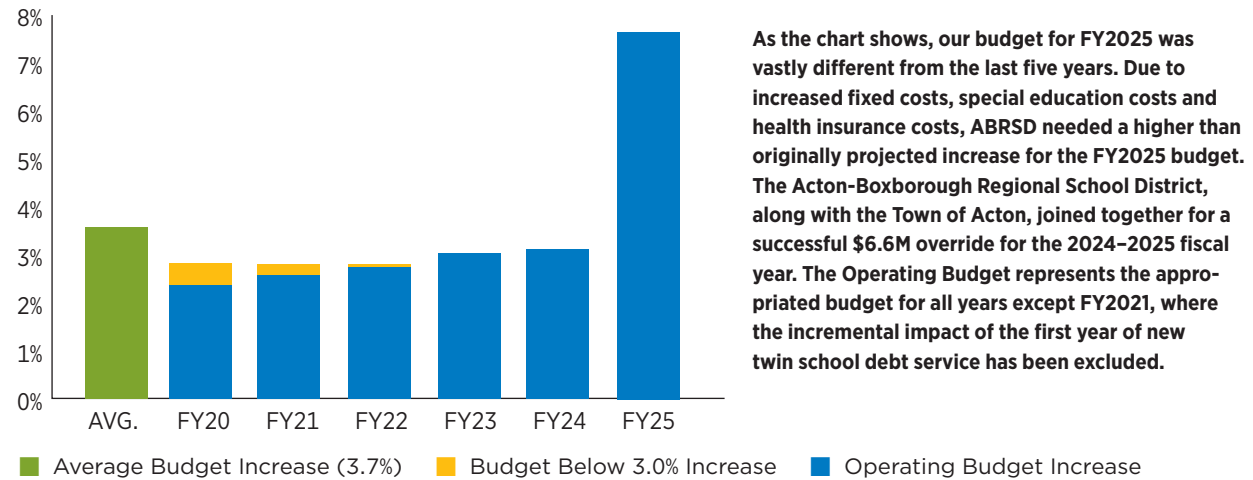
## FY24 Financial Highlights

- Chapter 70 (Minimum) Education Aid increased by \$60 per pupil (versus \$60 pp budgeted); represents \$3000K revenue variance.
- Regional Transportation final numbers were \$155,966 over anticipated.
- Interest rates on invested funds remained higher than expected and our projected investment income is over \$740K for FY24.
- Charter School reimbursement final numbers were \$84,289 over anticipated.
- Details of year-end budget-to-actual results will be presented in the preliminary FY2024 financial report to School Committee (August, 2024).

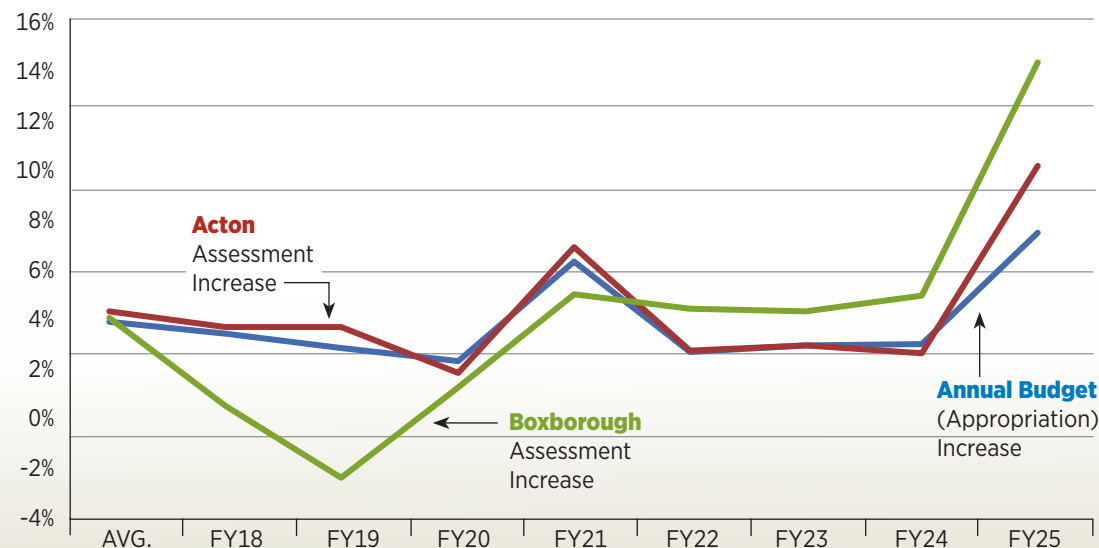
## FY25 Budget

- Both towns have voted approval of the District's FY2025 operating and capital budget (\$114.4M), an increase of 7.7% over FY2024.
- The Town of Acton community members voted a successful \$6.6M override vote for both the Town and Regional Schools.
- Boxborough's FY25 assessment increase (14.46%) is greater than Acton's (10.33%), due to Boxborough's relative proportion of K-12 enrollment.

## Annual Operating Budget Growth (%)



## Budget/Assessment Trends



Due to its significantly greater relative enrollment, Acton's assessments track closely with the District's annual budget increases. Prior to FY22, Boxborough benefitted from the "cost shift" during the first seven years of full regionalization. Since FY2022, and projected to continue for years beyond FY2025, Boxborough's assessment % increase exceeds the annual operating budget. Assessments are calculated based on the most recent three-year average of total enrollment for both towns.

# Teaching and Learning



## EARLY/ ELEMENTARY LITERACY

This was the first year of a five-year plan to implement the new literacy program, EL Education, in grades K-6. EL Education is a language arts program that empowers students to read complex grade-level texts and master literacy standards. It builds students' knowledge about their world through topics in social studies, STEAM and literature.

Early literacy screening assessments, as required by the State, were also implemented this year in grades K-3. These screening assessments are designed to help schools catch learning concerns while they are still in the early stages. The skills that were assessed are the building blocks for reading. Screening makes it possible to see if a student is at risk of developing reading difficulties, including risk of dyslexia. We look at skills that include alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, word reading, reading comprehension, and rapid automatized naming. Screening does not diagnose dyslexia or other disabilities but helps us understand which students may need additional support to be successful readers. Our district uses a literacy screening assessment called DIBELS 8th Edition, which is approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

## STUDENT LEARNING AT RJ GREY AND ABRHS

At RJGrey JH, the leadership team focused on studying how data teams and intervention could be more available at RJ Grey and also led initial staff meetings and conversations on more consistency in curriculum mapping and grading. These topics will be further explored next year along with implementation planning. The



ABRHS work focused on the five-year course leveling process with the completion of year one this school year. From the student learning experience, 82% of students stated that the work in their class was “a healthy challenge” (spring '24 student survey data).

## MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

The strategies employed to support data analysis as part of the continued implementation of MTSS in the elementary schools included various structures at the classroom, school, and District levels. At the classroom level, grade-level data analyses informed instructional planning for classroom instruction and FLEX blocks; at the school level, monthly Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) Meetings and periodic data dive meetings, provided opportunities to identify grades and curricular areas that needed additional support.

### DATA PLATFORM: FOREFRONT

One of the significant outcomes of this year's work was to select a new data platform. The Forefront platform can be used to upload, store, and display multiple data points and types of data that allow for a more holistic view of student learning.

### STUDENT OPPORTUNITY ACT

The MA DESE Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan was established to address the education of all students. It directs districts to address a subset of initiatives, focused on evidence-based programs and strategies that improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students and focus on rapidly improving outcomes of students with low academic performance.

For the 2024 SOA Plan our Leadership Team identified chronic absenteeism as the priority area. The majority (57.7%) of survey respondents indicated that, in order to address chronic absenteeism, the District focus area should be on developing partnerships with students and their families. The qualitative comments from the survey provided us with valuable information about the complexity of chronic absenteeism and the many causes of student absence from both external and internal factors. The input from the focus groups was very granular and provided us concrete examples of ways to obtain better information about the barriers of student attendance, how we could increase and measure family engagement, what learning we need to do as a District to effectively address chronic absenteeism, and what resources we should consider utilizing.

The District's SOA Plan includes steps to:

1. Increase consistent communication and engagement between schools and families

2. Create a multi-tiered system for reporting, recording, and responding to student chronic absenteeism
3. Provide for all staff more learning opportunities to learn about and address chronic absenteeism (from mindset and bias work to strategies and tools to engage with students and families/caregivers in meaningful, collaborative, proactive, and supportive two-way communication).

### MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

During 2023–2024, the number of multilingual learners (MLs) in Acton-Boxborough increased rapidly. We began the year with 319 multilingual students and ended with 439 multilingual students, an increase of 120 students. Many of these students are arriving from Brazil, Central and South America, and Russia which represents a new trend in our population. Another continuing trend is that the majority of MLs arriving are at the beginning levels of English proficiency. Historically, Acton-Boxborough has been very successful at exiting ML students within two to three years of entry into the Multilingual Education (MLE) program. This year was no exception with 95 MLs exiting from the MLE program.



### SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Special Education Department had another very successful year supporting our students with disabilities and their caregivers. As a department, we have focused on professional learning about the new IEP form that was released by DESE. The district is required to implement this new form, the first change in 20 years, beginning in September, 2024. The district also collaborated with SEPAC on two parent trainings to further support the transition everyone will experience this fall. In addition, elementary special education staff worked with their general education colleagues to implement the new literacy curriculum and participated with mathematics specialists in professional learning about dyscalculia. We look forward to continuing this work in the 2024–2025 school year.

### EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The Department of Educational Technology (EDTech) is dedicated to integrating technology into teaching and learning to enhance student learning, transform instructional practice, and support our district's educational goals. In A-B, every student has access to digital learning tools and resources that can be tailored to specific needs and learning opportunities. Our Digital Learning team works alongside teachers, staff, and students to create dynamic and interactive lessons serving as a catalyst for student-centered learning.

We know that having technology in our schools supports MTSS by providing data-informed instruction and interventions that address the diverse needs of students. Teachers utilize our universal screening and progress monitoring tools to identify students' needs and track their progress. The data collected from these tools allows teachers to make informed decisions about interventions, tailoring instruction to meet each student's unique needs.

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

## ACTON-BOXBOROUGH RESOURCE CENTER

Acton-Boxborough Resource Center (ABRC) is a new initiative launched in the Fall of 2023, a partnership between Acton-Boxborough United Way and the Acton-Boxborough School District, to proactively connect residents of Acton or Boxborough to local resources. Located at the District's administration building, ABRC provides information about what is available through the efforts of the dozens of local nonprofits serving Acton and Boxborough (on topics ranging from food security and transportation options to local trails and volunteer opportunities), and has an on-site "A-B Exchange" providing essential items (clothes, backpacks, and more, based on community donations).

Since the ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 13, 2023, the ABRC has seen a steady monthly increase in visitor numbers. The anonymized intake form allows us to capture some information about those stopping into ABRC. Visitors are coming from both towns: Acton (69%), Boxborough (16%), students with school staff (7%), unknown (7%). At least 29% of visitors just moved to Acton or Boxborough within the month before their visit, while another 25% have lived in the community at least a year (26% unknown for this measure). English is the most frequent language used for communication at ABRC (47%), followed by Spanish (25%) and Portuguese (15%).

Through the A-B Exchange, more than 5000 items (mostly clothing, plus other essentials including hygiene products and school supplies) donated by the community have found new homes. This includes more than 400 winter coats and 168 backpacks.

Beyond daily operation, ABRC has held several community events:

- **Resource & Volunteer Fair** (21 participating agencies)
- **Operation Warm Shoe Giveaway** in partnership with McGovern Subaru (39 families)
- Clothing Giveaway for surplus donations (138 families)
- **Welcome Dinner** for Families at Acton's Emergency Shelter



ABRC has been the central location for coordinating community support for the residents of Acton's Emergency Shelter. Thanks to the generosity of the community, ABRC put together robust bags of holiday gifts for each of the 21 children then living at the shelter. Through ABRC, volunteers have been trained and are now offering English Lessons five days a week at the shelter. Additional initiatives include pop-up clothing shops at the shelter, coordination of volunteers to help with transportation and offering of enriching children's activities on-site.

### **DESE'S PROMOTING SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE AND WELL-BEING GRANT**

We are pleased to announce that the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District has been awarded the DESE's Promoting Safe and Healthy Learning Environments: Elevating Student Voice and Well-Being Grant of \$40,000. This grant will enable us to provide counseling services to support the mental health and well-being of newcomer and homeless students. Recognizing that our students and families are burdened by traumatic experiences from their migration journeys, we emphasize the importance of incorporating trauma-informed practices in our educational approaches to support their emotional and psychological needs. Due to delays in insurance benefits, we understand there is limited to no access to counseling services, which are essential for

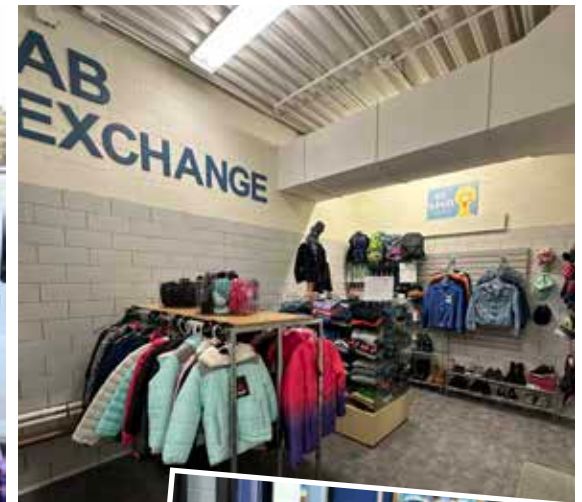
enhancing social and emotional skills and addressing experienced trauma. We are grateful for DESE's support in providing this critical and impactful service to our students and families.

### **LEADERSHIP COALITION**

Acton-Boxborough Regional School District's Leadership Coalition to

Combat Hate and Bias Speech is a group of dedicated students, educators, families, community members and administrators who hold influential leadership positions within our school community and are committed to combating hate and bias incidents and speech in our school community. The Leadership Coalition sought to combat

elements of our underlying culture that exists in the Acton-Boxborough school community which allows hate and bias speech to be perpetuated. This year, the group took action steps to focus on training educators to interrupt hate and bias at all the schools, as well as, revising and strengthening protocols for responding to Hate and Bias incidents.



# Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

## THE CASEL 5 FRAMEWORK: ENHANCING SEL IN SCHOOLS

The CASEL 5 Framework is an evidence-based approach to integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools, promoting students' academic, personal, and social development through five core competencies:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Recognizing one's emotions, thoughts, and values; understanding strengths and limitations.
2. **Self-Management:** Regulating emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; managing stress; self-motivation.
3. **Social Awareness:** Empathizing with others from diverse backgrounds; understanding social and ethical norms.
4. **Relationship Skills:** Building and maintaining healthy relationships; effective communication; conflict resolution.
5. **Responsible Decision-Making:** Making ethical, safe, and socially appropriate choices; considering consequences and well-being.

For the 2023–2024 school year, ABRSD focused on introducing the CASEL 5 Framework through:

- **Professional Development:** Training PK-8 educators
- **Targeted Instruction:** Teaching CASEL 5 competencies through schoolwide programs such as advisory periods, morning meetings, and whole school assemblies
- **Curriculum Integration:** Curriculum coaches worked to identify how SEL instruction integrates into the elementary math and reading programs
- **SEL Benchmarks:** Developing “Can Do” statements to define SEL skill progression K-6



## K-6 SEL “CAN DO” STATEMENTS

The mental health staff created K-6 developmental benchmarks for SEL skills, organized by CASEL competency and guided by a number of department of education SEL standards from states across the country. Skill progression is based on child development and presented as “Can Do” Statements, both in professional and student-friendly language. This work aims to support educator professional learning, student data-based decision making and progress monitoring, and the district’s Vision of a Graduate work.

## SECOND STEP PROGRAM: STARTING FALL 2024

ABRSD formed a K-12 Bullying Prevention and SEL Curriculum Task Force to identify an evidence-based program that aligns with CASEL and includes strong bullying prevention programming. **Second Step** was chosen for PK-12 implementation starting Fall 2024.

Key Components:

- **Skills-Based Lessons:** Age-appropriate lessons from preschool to 12th grade, including K-8 bullying prevention units.
- **Family Engagement:** Resources for families to support SEL at home.
- **Professional Development:** Training for educators on lesson delivery and classroom management.
- **Program Monitoring:** Tools to assess student progress and program effectiveness.

Research indicates that Second Step improves social-emotional skills, behavior, and academic achievement, supporting overall student well-being and success.



## Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program (CHECP)

The Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program (CHECP) is the district's specialized preschool program that provides a developmentally-based learning environment for students with identified special education needs and those who are developing typically. CHECP staff provides each child with the opportunity to learn and grow at his or her own pace. One hundred fifty students were enrolled in the program by the end of the school year. This included students who were supported with drive-in related services for speech-language therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy. Throughout the year CHECP staff also worked in collaboration with parents, pediatricians, area preschools and childcare programs and provided 58 special education evaluations and over 65 observations, screenings and consultations to support students and families in the community.

Some of the highlights of the year have been:

- In time for the start of CHECP's 2nd year at the Boardwalk Campus, the Puddles Playground construction was completed and open for student use. The new playground allows students of various developmental abilities to be able to play on an accessible playground.

- CHECP partnered with HILL For Literacy, Inc. to provide consultation and professional learning to increase staffs' knowledge to help support students' phonemic awareness and early literacy skills. Licensed Teachers and Speech & Language Pathologists participated in a 4 part series on the [Science of Reading](#) and a [HILL literacy](#) consultant also provided coaching and consultation to help support this work.
- In collaboration with the Gates School, prek students participated in [Celebrate the Arts Exhibition](#) and had artwork displayed in the show.
- The preschool classes were invited to watch the Douglas School's grade 6 classes' performance of [The Jungle Book](#).
- Preschoolers participated in specials (art, music, physical education, library) provided by the Gates Elementary School Specialists during the school year.
- CHECP hosted a family potluck. This provided an opportunity for staff and families to share a meal, get to know each other better and build a sense of community. One parent commented that it was "the best feel good feeling" they've had in a long time!

**Joseph Gibowicz**

EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATOR



# Blanchard

During the 2023–2024 school year, Blanchard Elementary School focused on enhancing literacy through the new EL Education program, addressing specific skill gaps with the Second Step Curriculum, and fostering a strong sense of belonging among students and staff by improving our school culture and climate.

Our professional development for staff emphasized familiarization with program protocols, literacy block components, and EL's instructional design. Staff participated in building and district instructional teams, which included peer observations.

We regularly integrated Restorative Practices into morning meetings and embedded Social-Emotional Learning into curriculum maps across all disciplines. All teachers implemented the Second Step program.

We sustained daily morning meetings, monthly student-led community meetings, and cross-grade buddy partnerships. Monthly Community Coffee sessions with families and support from our active Parent, Teachers, Friends (PTF) board provided connections, enrichment, and learning opportunities. Events such as the [PTF Fun Run](#), [Hygge Day](#), and [Kindergarten](#) and [New Student Socials](#), along with activities in yoga, nature, science, and archaeology, enriched our community. The school council conducted a student survey to identify trusted adults, and the Leadership Team revamped student placement for more equitable and supportive classrooms.



## Blanchard's STARR values

- Support
- Teamwork
- Attitude
- Responsibility
- Respect

**Dana Labb**  
PRINCIPAL

**Mike Votto**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



# Blanchard

## BLANCHARD HIGHLIGHTS

- Staff engaged in a year-long Restorative Practices workshop series covering Community Building Circles, Preventative Classroom Management, and prioritizing connection before content.
- The **Blanchard Concert Band** earned its 14th consecutive gold medal at the **Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors (MICCA) Concert**.
- Blanchard, supported by families, the district, and the Town of Boxborough, raised and allocated approximately **\$310,000** for a new inclusive and accessible playground.
- The **Festival of Cultures** featured over 17 family-hosted tables and 10 student performances. The PTF provided free access to events such as the Fall Festival, Bingo Night, and the Fun Run.
- The second annual **STEAM + Literacy Multi-Disciplinary Night** attracted over 250 families for reading, playing, exploring, experimenting, and creating together.



# Conant

During the 2023–2024 school year, students in Luther Conant Elementary School continued to grow, learn and celebrate their accomplishments. Kindergarten through Sixth Grade teachers and students invested many hours in the new EL curriculum; implementing and embracing this comprehensive, research-informed, core language arts program that engages teachers and students through compelling, real-world content. Both students and teachers expressed an excitement for continuing implementation next year.

- The month of March was filled with celebrations of all things literacy. Conant School had reading contests, author visits, recorded read alouds by special guests, and the creation of a bulletin board that creatively listed the favorite book title of every Conant student.
- Conant specialists, classroom teachers, instructional coaches and special educators collaborated to refine the expectations, protocols and expected outcomes within an MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) model based on shared responsibility for students and an effective use of universally collected data. Through the use of regular data team meetings students who needed additional support were identified and placed in targeted instructional groups for intensive support.
- The **Conant Student Council** and **Green Team** members were a positive school community presence throughout the school year. Conant students, who were elected or chosen to be a part of these important leadership groups, contributed to the school and wider community through supply drives, public education announcements and local service projects.

There was also a great deal of community building and fun at Conant School this year. The second annual **Fall Fest** was again a favorite of students and staff, the PTO sponsored **Conant Carnival** was attended by many families despite the unstable weather, and everyone's favorite Conant tradition, **Polar Pride**, was an event that did not disappoint.

The Luther Conant School also welcomed a new principal this year, Dr. Tricia O'Reilly, who is delighted to be part of such a special community.

**Dr. Tricia O'Reilly**  
PRINCIPAL

**Allison Leahy**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

## At Conant School:

- We believe that every person should feel valued and respected to enable belonging as well as meaningful teaching and learning.
- We believe that every individual is part of our community, and each person must take individual and collective responsibility to contribute to its success.



# Conant



# Douglas

At Douglas Elementary School, we aspire to cultivate curiosity and a love of learning in a joyful community, rooted in inclusivity, diversity, and respect for every individual. We strive to provide a quality and equitable education to all students to equip them to be brave, compassionate citizens of the world.

## CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

- Staff worked with our literacy coach to implement our new literacy curriculum, EL. As part of the implementation, staff collaborated with teachers across the district as they participated in district-wide professional learning.
- In its second year, our Instructional Leadership Team analyzed data regularly to support students and teachers. Teachers met to discuss this data and determine appropriate interventions to support students.
- We focused on best practices to support our growing population of multilingual students. Staff collaborated with our multilingual teacher and looked at what our multilingual students can-do and how we can support their growth and progress.
- Our culturally responsive teacher leaders and administration worked to bring culturally responsive teaching practices to their classrooms, understanding how to support their students by recognizing each student's background.
- We began to focus on social-emotional learning for both adults and students through the lens of the CASEL Core Competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.



**Larry Wolpe**  
PRINCIPAL

**Lizbeth Feliciano**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

## Our SOAR Values:

- S** Show Perseverance
- O** Offer Compassion
- A** Act Responsibly
- R** Respect Others and Self

# Douglas

**C.T. Douglas Elementary School was a vibrant place of learning and fun. Some beloved traditions that continued included:**

- The 22nd Commemorative **Peace Walk**
- **National Unity Day** Celebration
- **Veterans Day** Celebration
- Band and Orchestra concerts
- Second Annual Art Show
- **Memorial Day Concert**
- Douglas Day celebrated physical education/wellness
- Sixth-grade musical **“The Jungle Book”**
- PTO hosted events including the **Celebration of Cultures, Douglas Carnival**, and **Trunk or Treat**
- Enrichment activities included: Eyes on Owls, Geochemist Ethan Baxter, and violinist Adrian Anantawan

## Other activities:

- Student Council worked to create theme days
- SOAR Team-Staff worked to reinforce schoolwide expectations
- Collaborative work on School Culture to create updated mission, vision, and values
- Multilingual Family Night
- Bi-weekly Douglas Dispatch-caregiver communication



# Gates

This year, Gates Elementary School continued to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for our students, with a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL). Our dedication to inclusivity was demonstrated through the continued commitment to implementing responsive classroom routines across all grades. These routines have helped create a positive, safe, and respectful classroom atmosphere, promoting active engagement and a sense of belonging among students.

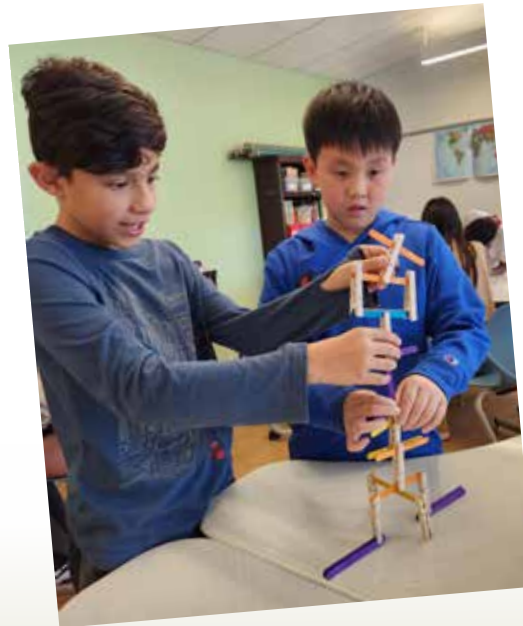
In our efforts to enhance social-emotional learning, we piloted an SEL curriculum in classrooms. Additionally, we implemented an SEL screener across all grade levels to identify school-wide needs. This screener provided valuable insights into the social-emotional well-being of our students, allowing us to tailor our all school approach to more effectively meet our students' needs. At the end of the year, the Gates school showed improvement across all grade levels, supporting the implementation of our SEL curriculum.

**Allison Warren**  
PRINCIPAL

**Kate Worth**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

## Gates Core Values

- Generosity
- Acceptance
- Trust & Respect
- Enthusiasm
- Scholarship



# Gates

Community engagement is important at Gates. This year we hosted several events that brought together students, families, and staff, strengthening our school community. Highlights included:

- The **Robotics Fair**, where students showcased their innovative projects and our own high school robotics team participated showing off the robot they had built for competition.
- The **Ice Cream Social**, which provided a fun environment for families to connect, and eat a large quantity of ice cream along with games and outdoor playing.
- Our **Culture Event**, a celebration of the diverse backgrounds and traditions that enrich our school. This event is always a favorite for our community as it allows families to share important parts of their culture with the school.
- **Fun Run, Walk, and Roll**, came back this year, thanks to our supportive PTO! Students and staff ran, walked and rolled together while enjoying a beautiful day.
- Finally, our **Celebrate the Arts Night** was a huge success. Pre-K-6th grade art work was on display throughout the leaning commons and steam labs, along with musical performances in the cafeteria.



McCarthy-Towne Elementary School is a vibrant community of learners where children, teachers, and families collaborate to foster individual growth and success in a dynamic world. Our unique approach to art integration empowers students to explore their identities and the learning process. We appreciate the active involvement of families and staff in the school's decision-making.

## 2023-24 HIGHLIGHTS

### Community

- All school assemblies included guests like **Become Your Dreams: History of Hip Hop Dance**.
- Our 5th graders visited **Merrowvista** for an overnight camping trip.
- Our PTSO hosted a **McHearty Party**, a **World Heritage Day** celebration, a movie night, and an Art Show.

### Multi-tiered Systems of Support

- Grades K-6 implemented our new EL Education literacy program, which improved reading and writing skills across all grade levels.
- Our dedicated staff implemented and enhanced our data meeting practices, focusing on tier one instruction in ELA and tier two instruction in Math. This strategic approach has significantly contributed to our students' academic progress.
- Staff refined our flex block practices to increase the targeted instruction each student receives.

### Christy Nealon

PRINCIPAL

### Matt McDowell

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

### McCarthy-Towne Core Values

- Community
- Risk taking
- Collaboration
- Persistence
- Flexibility
- Trust



# McCarthy-Towne

## Culturally Responsive Practices

- Our staff completed the district-created *Interrupting Hate and Bias in Our Schools* training
- Every classroom learned about **UN-TEASE-ABLES** to increase student awareness of the power of their words.
- A subcommittee of our PTSO completed a guidance document to support PTSO event planning.



## Social Emotional Learning

- Through assemblies, classroom lessons, and school-wide recognitions, our school learned about and practiced the CASEL frameworks for Self-Management and Social Awareness.
- We held daily morning meetings, quiet time, and closing circles to increase students' sense of belonging and social-emotional learning.



## Art Integration

- Students continued to learn about themselves as learners through the art integration process.
- We held an art show, during which students shared a piece from their art integration practice and one from the visual arts studio.



# Merriam

Merriam Elementary School is centered in project-based learning, where experiential, hands-on opportunities for students foster skill development, inquiry, self-confidence, creativity, collaboration and a joy for learning. Merriam emphasizes community building, supported by activities like All School Meeting, Theme Days, Family Groups and Buddies.

## COMMUNITY

- This year's theme was **Celebrations**, marking Merriam's **30th anniversary**. Through a theme of celebrations, we embraced opportunities to recognize and honor the diverse cultural backgrounds, traditions, and identities represented within our school.
- All School Meeting assemblies led by sixth graders included student performers, artists, musicians, dancers, slideshow presentations, and student-created plays and projects.
- During **Literacy Week**, students and staff showcased their creativity with handmade costumes of storybook characters and beautifully decorated door displays.

**Christina Gavin**

PRINCIPAL

**Kaitlyn Angulo**

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

## Merriam Core Values

- Risk taking
- Persistence in Learning
- Respect

## PROJECT BASED LEARNING

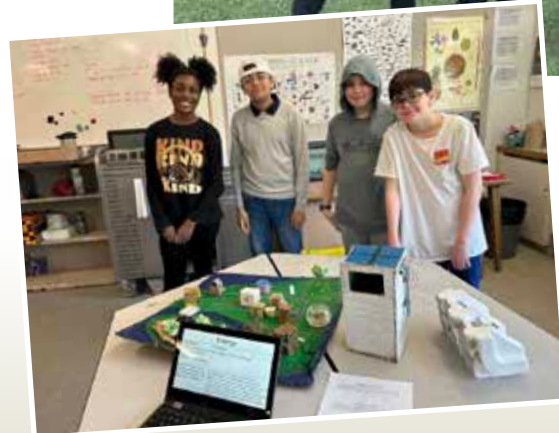
- As part of the Life Science unit, third-grade students undertook a long term project researching endangered animal species in Massachusetts. Students featured their work at the Acton Discovery Museum, integrating science, math, music, art, reading, writing, technology, and stop-motion animation into their project displays. Students collaborated with ABRHS and our own local Acton Conservation team to learn about biodiversity, and the factors impacting endangered animals. As a culmination to their efforts, students participated in a community service meadow restoration project.
- For the **Green Cities project**, 6th-grade students designed sustainable urban environments for an island off the coast of Massachusetts, focusing on adapting to and mitigating climate change. Students created detailed slideshows, 3D maps, and interactive models highlighting green features. They presented their work to families and peers, answering questions about their designs and technology's connection to impacting climate change.



# Merriam

## CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

- Once a year, all Merriam students hold independent, student-led conferences with their parents in the classroom. This is an opportunity for students to become “leaders of their own learning” as they reflect on their progress, present their work, and engage families in meaningful dialogue about academic milestones and personal growth.
- As part of our continued efforts with MTSS, all grade levels implemented daily Flex blocks where students received tiered supports and interventions in math and literacy.
- During the 2023–2024 school year, Merriam prioritized literacy instruction as we implemented the EL Education program. Professional development for staff emphasized collaboration with grade level colleagues, EL protocols, literacy block components, and EL’s instructional design.
- Our Culturally Responsive Teacher Leaders and Administration facilitated professional learning sessions on gender inclusivity and culturally responsive teaching practices. All staff participated in professional learning focused on Interrupting Hate and Bias. Looking ahead to next year, we will continue our efforts to create a safe, joyful, and inclusive school culture, with a focus on social emotional learning and restorative practices.



# RJ Grey

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The students and staff of RJ Grey Junior High School had a productive year. Our 822 students worked with us to continue building a joyful, inclusive community of engaged learners.

- This year, a goal of our Advisory program was to focus on the community. As such, we partnered with the **Acton Food Pantry** on multiple occasions. We started with a food drive in November. In March, we collected loose change through our **Change for Change drive**. Our staff and students collected enough change to be able to present a check for \$1,047 to Donna Bottari of the Food Pantry.
- Our seventh-grade social studies classes continued to build on their understanding of civics and their ability to make change. This year, we benefited greatly when several members of the Town of Boxborough visited with our 7th graders and talked about their roles in government and civic life. The culmination of our civics study was the **Civics Fair** where families, elected officials, and the greater community had the chance to learn about what our students studied in their projects. We deeply appreciate the support of the League of Women Voters and others in the community for their support of this ongoing learning.

- Our students continue to inspire us through their work outside of the classroom. Our athletic teams excelled this year and included hundreds of students in competitions against local schools. Our fall musical, **Rock of Ages, Youth Edition** was a hit with audiences. We hosted Chess Club, Dungeons and Dragons Club, Green Team, Mathcounts, and dozens of other clubs and activities this year.

These extracurricular activities, along with the work that students do in their classrooms create opportunities for all students to connect with peers and trusted adults at school. Our spring student survey indicated that 89% of our students have a trusted adult here at school, up from 83% at the end of last year. We are thrilled that our students find RJ Grey to be a safe place to learn.

Follow us on Instagram (@rjgreyjhs) to see more of our joy, community, and engaged learning on a regular basis!



**James Marcotte**  
PRINCIPAL

**Kelly Doherty**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

**Elizabeth Broadwater**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

**Jun Wei (Anthony) Zhang**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



**At RJ Grey Junior High School,** our vision is to create a community of thinkers, learners, and responsible citizens.



## RJ Grey



# ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL High School

**Joanie Dean**

PRINCIPAL

**Betty Baker**

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

**Michael Csorba**

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

**Maurin O'Grady**

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

**Christopher Ocampo**

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

This year, the high school celebrated community and connections through our first-ever **Community and Social Justice Flex Block in March**, the inaugural **Senior Clap Out Celebration** in May, the annual Senior Dress Up Day in November, and our third annual Step Up Ceremony in June.

In its second year, our **Advisory program** continued to build relationships across the building. Advisories consisted of 10-12 students from all four grade levels and met weekly to discuss high school issues and upcoming events.

We implemented the first year of our course leveling shifts that focused on increasing access to advanced level courses and providing more diverse learning opportunities. Finally, staff continued to incorporate culturally responsive practices into instruction and responses to incidents.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Over a third of our students participated in 70 clubs and activities. Speech and Debate, Science Team, Math Team, Academic Decathlon, Quiz Bowl, Invest in Girls, Ocean Bowl, and Badminton took part in local and national competitions.
- Affinity groups hosted community events such as the Korean Language Club's Chuseok Festival, the Jewish Student Union's Potato Latke Making, Dear Asian Youth's Garba Night, and the Muslim Student Association's Ramadan Community Fasting Awareness Event.
- Staff and A-B Students for Equity and Justice (ABSEJ) Club hosted our first-ever Community Building and Social Justice Flex Block in March. 45 workshops were led by teachers, and community members including Bhel Puri Making, Sociolinguistics & Gender Bias, Deconstructing Bias in Artificial Intelligence, Sign Language, Climate Change, History of Tea and Origami, Therapy Alpaca Farm, A-B Resource Center, and Responses to Mass Incarceration and Racial Injustice, Interrupting Hate Speech, and The Artwork and Murals of Chicano Park.



# High School

- The 24th annual **Community Service Awards Night** honored 645 students who volunteered for over 70,000 hours in 2023.
- Through the generosity of our communities, we awarded over 155 local scholarships that totaled approximately \$150,000 at the 32nd annual **Scholarship Night**.
- **Proscenium Circus** performed **The Music Man**, **METG** State semi-finalist **A Doll's House**, and an evening of **Adventures of Sherlock Holmes**.
- Nearly 100 A-B Ambassadors welcomed the 9th Grade class with tours and mentorship during the transition to high school.
- 250 student musicians performed the **Spring in Motion: From Pixels to Playbills Concert at Groton Hill Music Center**. ABRHS Choruses presented our 29th Annual Cabaret Night, and the Orchestra presented its first-ever Masquerade Concert. The Madrigal Singers traveled to Costa Rica for performances, volunteer projects, and elementary school visits. The Band, Chorus, and Orchestra invited elementary and junior high school students to town-wide concerts in the Regan Gym. The ABRHS Band had a successful fall season and performed in the Marlborough Labor Day and Acton Memorial Day parades.
- We offered these courses for the first time this year: Intro to Science Research, Modern Art History, Ukulele & Piano, and Public Speaking.
- A number of students participated in Early College through dual and concurrent enrollment. We offered Introduction to Macroeconomics in partnership with Middlesex Community College and summer study of PreCalculus through University of Vermont, UMass Lowell, and University of New England.



# High School

- Recognizing and promoting scholarship, leadership, service, and character, we inducted 113 new members into our National Honor Society.
- The World Language Department hosted our annual **World Cultures Week** with dance performances, food, games and activities, language immersion, and a Student Stories panel.
- Villageworks hosted our **Annual Senior Art Show** in May showcasing our student artists and their artwork.
- Student Council ran many successful events including our Homecoming, Senior Dress Up Day, the Student & Staff Basketball Game, and Spring Fling. They donated \$4708 in mini-grants to other clubs.
- ABRSD Athletics had 54 teams this year with a total of 1205 participating students. We won 10 DCL titles, and it was our 15th consecutive year of winning a state championship. Congratulations to our **Boys Indoor Winter Track Team** and **Boys Spring Track and Field Team** for winning State Championships!
- In our second year, over 40 students participated in the Unified Basketball and Track & Field teams. We were awarded the honor of being named a Unified Champion School.
- Nearly 400 seniors participated in 54 service projects throughout Acton and Boxborough for the 30th Annual Senior Community Service Day. Seniors enjoyed Prom at the Danversport Yacht Club on May 3 and their afternoon at Kimball Farm on June 4. **We are very proud of our 407 graduates of the Class of 2024!**



# Staff Update

## We thank our retiring staff for their many years of dedication to the district:

Suzanne Buell	Special Education Assistant	McTowne
Rip Cail	Elementary Teacher	Douglas
Joanne Chadwick	School Nurse Leader	RJ Grey
Richard Cowen	School Psychologist	RJ Grey
Kerin Crockett	Elementary Teacher	Blanchard
Debbie Dawson	Guidance Counselor	Conant
Luanne Flood	Prog. Administrator	Comm Ed
Patricia Garrison	English Language Teacher	ABRHS
Nancy Hall	Math Teacher	ABRHS
Jane Link	Registrar	ABRHS
Louise Loblundo	Elementary Office Administrator	Gates
Cathy Loebbs	School Nurse	ABRHS
Susan Nugent	Math Teacher	ABRHS
Michele Pruett	Elementary Teacher	Merriam
Suzanne Ritter	Elementary Teacher	Douglas
Diane Spring	School Nurse Leader	Gates
Lee Tyler	Facilities Administrator	ABRSD
Jennifer Vacca	English Teacher	RJ Grey
Kim Ward	Music Teacher	Gates
Carol Watson	World Language Teacher	RJ Grey



## Congratulations to our staff who have achieved 20 years of service to the district:

Sandra Alexander	Administrative Assistant	HS
William Chan	Physical Education Teacher	Conant
Anne Chandler	Administrative Assistant	JH
Richard Cowen	School Psychologist	JH
Jon Duclos	Guidance Counselor	JH
Brian Edwards	Custodian Lead	HS
Jennifer Gabel	Guidance Counselor	HS
Eliza Greene	Art Teacher	HS
Patrick Grucela	History Teacher	HS
Julie Head	Custodian Head	HS
Suzanne Hoag	Physical Education Teacher	HS
Mary Price Maddox	History Teacher	HS
Melissa Mastrolia	Art Teacher	Conant
Debra McLean	Special Educator	Preschool
Ann Marie	Reading Teacher	Conant
Mercadante-Pastor		
Amy Morse	Special Educator	Preschool
Jennifer Moss	Music Teacher	HS
Peter Olsen	Custodian	HS
Bridget Priest	Crossing Guard/Food Service	Dist./Blanch.
Michelle Pruett	Elementary Teacher	Merriam
Heather Saniuk	Chemistry Teacher	HS
Patricia Sears	Math Teacher	HS
Lesley Scott-Morton	History Teacher	HS
Kelli Silk	Special Educator	Gates
Meredith	Speech Language Pathologist	Conant
Toll-Abramowitz		
Patricia Underwood	Kindergarten Teacher	Merriam
Betty Ann Vitale	Elementary Teacher	Conant
Elizabeth Walker	ASC Teacher	JH

## 2024-2025 New Professional Staff, as of August 1, 2024

Gabrielle Abrams	Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning	
Colby Baker	Assistant Principal	ABRHS
Mary Emmons	Interim Director of Special Education	
Lynne Newman	Interim Assistant Principal	Blanchard
Nelia Felicia Patrick	Assistant Principal	Douglas
Michelle Riley	Director of Nursing	
James Scanlon	Athletic Director	

## 2024-2025 New Teachers/Certified Staff, as of August 1, 2024

Taylor Balunis	Special Educator/Pathways	Blanchard
Maria Bottos	School Nurse	Blanchard
Katie Silverman	Special Educator/Pathways	Blanchard
Isabel Burgess	Kindergarten Teacher	Conant
Matthew McGinnis	Music Teacher	Conant
Meghan Moran	Special Educator/Connections	Conant
Heather Parsons	School Counselor	Conant
Nicole Cioffi	Special Educator/Learning Ctr.	Douglas
Emma Mrozicki	4th Grade Teacher	Douglas
Elana Rose	5th Grade Teacher	Douglas
Megan Lenkauskas	School Nurse	Gates
Melyssa Langell	Speech Language Pathologist	Gates/Mer./McT
Jillian Tarlin	3rd Grade Teacher	Gates
Lila Teenyanoff	Library Media Specialist	Gates
Margaret Keene	Literacy Coach	McT/Merriam
Kathleen Bielak	Math Specialist	McT
Kristy Conway	4th Grade Teacher	McT
Ali Ghassabian	Music Teacher	McT
Laura Harrington	Library Media Specialist	McT
Eva Perhanidis	Kindergarten Teacher	McT
Jillian Roddy	Special Educator/Learning Ctr.	McT
Andrea Darisse	2nd/3rd Grade Teacher	Merriam
Jennifer Magnuson	BCBA	Merriam
Amelia Sinha	Special Educator	Merriam
Eri Buitrago	Spanish Teacher	JH
Amanda Frank	School Nurse	JH
Jennie Langberg	Library Media Specialist	JH
Amy Lee	Science Teacher	JH
Chad Nichols	School Psychologist	JH
Lisa Palaia	Multilingual Education Teacher	JH
Rolf Wasserman	Digital Literacy Teacher	JH
Heather Arthur	STAR Academic Coordinator	ABRHS
Brianna Cochran	English Teacher	ABRHS
John Crespi	Spanish Teacher	ABRHS
Michael Gilmartin	Math Teacher	ABRHS
Michele Hirth	Special Educator/ODP Prog.	ABRHS
Colby Schalek	Special Educator/Horizons Prog.	ABRHS
Kurt Sjoblom	Math Teacher	ABRHS
Hallie Starkey	Math Teacher	ABRHS
Kristen Truong	Science Teacher	ABRHS





# Operations

## FACILITIES, FOOD SERVICES, TECHNOLOGY, AND TRANSPORTATION

### FACILITIES

The A-B Facilities department was busy in FY24. A new team including The Director of Finance and Operations, Facility Coordinator, and Assistant Facilities Coordinator was quickly getting up to speed and had to hit the ground running. In addition to new staff, the facilities department includes a team of an Administrative Assistant, Energy Manager, four Tradespeople, two Grounds, and 29 Custodians.

The Boardwalk building, campus and grounds have been successfully completed. Although still adapting to the operation of this state-of-the-art mechanical system the building is meeting and or exceeding projected energy use to date. A Districtwide phone system replacement—motivated by new Federal e911 legislation—was completed at the Administration Building, Conant, Parker Damon Building, ABRHS, and RJ Grey JHS. These upgrades complete the district as both Blanchard and the Boardwalk Campus were completed/built out in FY23. Meanwhile, at the Administration building, some renovations of underutilized spaces were completed to create the new “A-B Resource Center.” Additional spaces at the Administration building were retrofitted for the remaining district offices to move into the space including Food Service, Facilities,

and Educational Technology. The Blanchard School received exterior work to the aesthetics with painting, trim work. The kitchen’s floor was replaced with poured epoxy. The Conant School had a major abatement project and replaced the ceiling tiles throughout the building.

Finally, the Facilities team responded to many calls pertaining to maintenance and repair of electrical, plumbing, and mechanical systems. A new Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) was implemented to better track and distribute maintenance requests. Notable among these projects were emergency replacement of a leaking heating hot water system at the Administration Building, and an emergency replacement of the HVAC control system at the Parker Damon Building.

### TECHNOLOGY

The Department of Educational Technology (EDTech) is driven by a passion for leveraging technology to enhance learning experiences for students while also supporting all of our administrative and business offices. Our mission is to empower our learning community with dependable technology solutions and robust support, enabling everyone to reach their

full potential and further the district’s commitment to delivering exceptional education for all students.

Our dedicated team combines infrastructure, data management, servers, and desktop support services with on-site technology integration and instruction to meet the diverse technology needs of all members of our learning community. Our support extends to administrative and business operations, streamlining processes and improving efficiency through integrated technology solutions. By integrating cutting-edge tools, platforms, and strategies into the curriculum and administrative offices, we strive to equip everyone with the resources they need for success.

### TRANSPORTATION

In the Spring of 2024, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District was awarded \$200,000 towards an electric school bus by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), through the Clean School Bus Rebate Program. Our departments have been working with other organizations to apply for grant funding in order to take advantage of this process and secure a charging station and hopefully be able to purchase two electric buses.

## FROM THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE CHAIR

**Adam Klein**

CHAIR, ACTON-BOXBOROUGH SCHOOL COMMITTEE



As we look ahead to the 2024-2025 school year, our primary goal is to evaluate ways to create a more sustainable budget. This effort is driven by the community's support for the override, and we are committed to using

these resources wisely. We have established a dedicated taskforce to guide this work and present their findings and recommendations to the School Committee. Community input will be integral to these efforts, ensuring that the voices of our residents are heard.

Equally important is our ongoing commitment to ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality education. We are dedicated to promoting equity and removing barriers to create an inclusive learning environment for all students. Our efforts will focus on addressing the diverse needs of our community, making sure that every child has the opportunity to succeed. Thank you for your continued support as we strive to achieve these goals together.



## LOOKING AHEAD

### Peter Light

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



As we look ahead to the 2024-25 School Year, we are planning some key initiatives that we want the community to know about. Here are just a few.

**The School Committee is establishing a fiscal sustainability steering committee.** This committee will be composed of stakeholders from both communities and will work with the administration and a consultant to look for opportunities to stabilize the school

budget, grow in a way that is sustainable for the communities, and prioritize student needs.

**Our schools will be focused on partnering with families to improve student attendance.** Since the pandemic, we have followed the state-wide trend of high levels of chronic absenteeism (missing more than 10 percent of the school year). We want to partner with families to help our students attend school more regularly.

**We will be implementing a new bullying prevention and social-emotional learning curriculum in all of our schools.** This is part of our broader effort to focus on students' social-emotional needs and increase their sense of belonging in our schools.

**We will be working with the community to help develop a Districtwide Vision of a Graduate.** A Vision of a Graduate is a set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that a community believes its graduates should possess upon receiving their high school diploma. This vision then helps us to make important strategic and curricular decisions about student learning.

**We are excited about the 2024-25 school year** and continuing to improve our students for the benefit of our students!



# Welcome Our New Administrators



## **GABRIELLE ABRAMS**

### **Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning**

We are pleased to welcome Gabrielle Abrams as the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning. Prior to joining A-B, Gabrielle was the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Medway Public Schools; a role she held since 2015. Previously, she served as an Instructional Leadership and Executive

Director, Assistant Principal and instructional coach for the Marlborough Public Schools. Gabrielle started her educational career as a middle school teacher in both Bristol, New Hampshire and Southborough, Massachusetts. She recently received her doctorate in Educational Leadership from Boston College and has a masters degree from Framingham State and a bachelor's degree from Hofstra University.

## **JAMES SCANLON**

### **Athletic Director**

We are pleased to welcome James Scanlon as the Director of Athletics. Prior to joining A-B, Mr. Scanlon was the Director of Athletics for the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District, a role he served in since 2020. Prior to that position, he served as the Director of Athletics for the Grafton Public Schools for three years, and as the Head Athletic Trainer at Grafton High School from 2014 to 2020. He has experience as a Faculty Lecturer, Graduate Assistant, and Graduate Athletic Trainer at several colleges, and has served as a member of the MIAA Sports Medicine Committee, Unified Sports Advisory Committee, and numerous other sports and standing committees since 2014. James has a Master of Science in Athletic Training from Bridgewater State University and a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from the UMass-Amherst.



## **MARY EMMONS**

### **Interim Director of Special Education**

We are pleased to welcome Mary Emmons as the Interim Director of Special Education. Most recently, Ms. Emmons served as the Administrator for Student Services for the Lincoln Public Schools until her retirement. Prior to that role, she had a 20-year career at A-B as a special education teacher, Special Education Coordinator, Out-of-District Coordinator, and Interim Pupil Services/Special Education Director.

## **MICHAEL VOTTO**

### **Interim Principal, Blanchard Memorial School**

We are pleased to announce that Michael Votto will serve as the Interim Principal for the Blanchard Memorial School for the 2024–25 school year. For the last four years, Mr. Votto served as the assistant principal at Blanchard and has earned a great deal of respect among students, staff, and families. Prior to joining AB, Mr. Votto was a classroom teacher for 22 years. Mr. Votto spent six years at the Foxboro Regional Charter School, two years in New Haven, CT, and 14 years in Andover Public Schools.



## **MICHELLE RILEY**

### **Director of Nursing Services**

We are pleased to welcome Michelle Riley as the Director of Nursing Services for the District. Prior to A-B, Michelle was a nurse in the Tyngsborough Public Schools since 2012, and was their Head Nurse since 2019. She also served as a board member on the Tyngsborough Board of Health from 2019 to 2022. Michelle has a BS in Communications from Arizona State University, and a Masters in Nursing from Worcester State.

Acton-Boxborough Regional School District  
**2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT**

