



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District  
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www.abschools.org

15-1

**Deborah E. Bookis**  
Director of Curriculum and Assessment

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TO: Dr. Glenn Brand, Superintendent of Schools  
FROM: Deborah Bookis, Director of Curriculum and Assessment  
DATE: September 2015  
RE: Summer Professional Learning

This summer our educators logged many hours on campus, attending workshops and working collaboratively on Research and Development Projects. Below are some highlights.

### Research and Development

Over one hundred fifty educators worked on over fifty Research and Development projects to create curriculum and assessment. Research and Development (R&D) projects are intended to substantively advance current practice. Proposals are written in the spring and then thoroughly evaluated by a committee of administrators and educators to make certain they incorporate the following components:

- ~ What problem or need in current practice does this proposal address?
- ~ How will the R&D rectify this problem?
- ~ How does the proposal incorporate new thinking?
- ~ What will be produced/created?
- ~ With whom and how will the product be shared?
- ~ What measures will be used to evaluate the success of the project?

This summer, a great many R&Ds included collaboration by classroom educators, special education teachers, ELL teachers and academic support teachers to address the current needs of our students. These projects included, *Best Practices in the Academic Support Center*, *A Collaborative Approach to ELL Support*, *Modifying Curriculum: 7th Grade Science and Social Studies* and *Blended Learning for At-Risk Students of English*. Other R&D project titles included: *Evaluating and Expanding the Play of Preschoolers*, *Facilitating Discussions in the Mathematics Classroom*, and *Alignment of Senior English Project with Service Learning*.



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## **Technology Workshops**

- ~ Creating Websites for the Classroom with Google Sites
- ~ Google Classroom, Goobric, and More
- ~ Google Drive: Basics and Beyond
- ~ iPads in the Primary Classroom
- ~ YouTube for Educators

## **Fostering Mathematical Practices Level I, PreK-12**

This three-day professional development workshop focused on learning and implementing the Mathematical Practices from the MA Mathematical Framework in grades PreK-12. Educators connected the mathematical practices to the critical areas, learned the key ideas in each practice, learned a set of questions to prompt mathematical practice use with students, identified evidence of the mathematical practices in the problem-solving process, and learned several instructional routines to develop the practices. This was the first part of a two-part series.

## **Fostering Mathematical Practices Level II, PreK-12**

This two-day professional development workshop built upon practices learned in the "Fostering Mathematical Practices, Level I" course. It focused on integrating the Mathematical Practices from the MA Mathematical Framework in grades PreK-12 into classroom instruction. Educators learned research-based, specific instructional routines and practices designed to foster the mathematical practice standards for all students and spent time planning and rehearsing the routines for their specific student population.

## **Adolescent Literacy Summer Institute**

Three *ADLit* Coaches and a Boston University Mathematics Professor facilitated a five-day institute for the second cohort of classroom teachers, special educators, academic support center educators, and administrators. The topics addressed aligned closely with the MA ELA and Literacy Framework, as well as the MA Mathematical Framework (focus on vocabulary and discussion). Some of the educators from cohort one shared their learning and work as well. Core topics included: disciplinary literacy strategies, academic language and specific vocabulary instruction, motivating and engaging adolescents with text, classroom discussions, text complexity, choosing and using multiple texts, and text-based questions and answers.

## **Summer Superintendent Leadership Institute**

Over 45 district leaders spent two days this summer focused on building an effective leadership team and identifying short- and long-term district goals. The specific goals for the institute included: creating time for reflecting and thinking together, gaining a fuller understanding of the district leadership structure and establishing effective leadership functioning, defining the district's goals and planning for 2015-2016, and refining work with the Educator Evaluation Process.

**Mentor Workshop**

For new mentors, a workshop was held in anticipation of meeting and working with their protégés. The workshop focused on peer observations, feedback, protocols, classroom management, and district policies and procedures.

**Leadership Retreat**

A smaller group of district leaders, comprised by Cabinet Members and Building Principals, spent two days this summer focused on reflecting upon our first year as a fully regionalized system, analyzing the Superintendent's Entry Plan Findings, determining areas of district focus, and learning about Improvement Science and how to utilize it in our work.



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TO: Dr. Glenn Brand, Superintendent of Schools  
FROM: Deborah Bookis, Director of Curriculum and Assessment  
DATE: September 2015  
RE: Report on Professional Learning Day, August 31, 2015

The August 2015 Professional Learning Day was planned and organized by individual schools to support the learning and work of their respective goals. Below are the Professional Learning Day summaries from the schools of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

**Acton-Boxborough Regional High School: Submitted by JoAnn Campbell**

We had three parts to our professional learning.

*Workload and Assessment* ~ Our colleagues (Department Leaders Sinikka Gary, David Green, and Dianne Telicki and Associate Principal Beth Baker) led us through an overview and mini-workshop of our next steps as a school in our work related to workload and assessment. The leadership team used data collected over the past two years and the results of the faculty's cross-departmental work last year to outline three framing questions that all departments will use as we move forward this year in looking at assessment:

- 1) What do you want students to learn in your class this year?
- 2) Do your assessments measure this learning?
- 3) How much assessment is needed to measure this learning?

*Making Caring Common (MCC): Working Together to Build Stronger Relationships and Community* ~ Our colleagues (Senior Career Activities Coordinator Genevieve Hammond, Counselor Jen Harris, Dean of Students Pete Cavanaugh, English teacher Glenn Manning, and Associate Principal Beth Baker) presented MCC to the faculty. They addressed why we have chosen MCC as one vehicle to strengthen relationships with students and sustain a culture of caring at the high school. They presented data from student surveys to support this work. They also shared several ways that we will incorporate MCC, including a Student Climate Committee, our existing Ambassadors program, our weekly Advisory program, and our monthly faculty meetings. Our Mental Health and Wellness Committee will oversee the integration of this work across departments and in partnership with our students.

*Special Education Program Presentations: Building Relationships to Support our Students* ~ The teachers and assistants in our specialized programs and our learning centers hosted presentations in their respected classroom spaces for faculty who have students in their

classes who access special education services. The teachers gave an overview of the program, a general profile of students who access support services and their respective needs, outlined best practices for strong communication and partnership, and answered questions from faculty and staff. The purpose of this professional development was to build a stronger connection between regular and special educators on behalf of our students.

**Blanchard School: Submitted by Dana Labb**

On August 31, Blanchard Memorial School faculty and staff participated in the first professional learning day of the 2015-2016 school year. A total of 110 participants included administrators, teachers, assistants, as well as members of the McCarthy-Towne School community. The morning was focused on Mindfulness. Presenter Joanne Meehan, CASE counselor at Blanchard, discussed the attitudinal foundations of Mindfulness, eating meditation and reflections, brain changes, mindful breathing and healing, as well as loving kindness and mindfulness in education. Additionally, she led participants through a series of calming classroom routines. After lunch, Akira Gutierrez, Research Analyst at Tufts University, trained staff on the study of social, emotional and character development research initiative that Blanchard will be participating in this year. The remainder of the day was dedicated to easing anxiety for children at home and in school. Lisa Flynn, founder and director of Yoga 4 Classrooms and ChildLight Yoga is internationally recognized for her engaging presentations on school yoga and mindfulness for children. Every participant received Yoga 4 Classrooms card decks. Additionally, many participants received a complimentary five-minute massage from Marceline of Marceline Massage Therapy in Boxborough.

**Carol P. Huebner Early Childhood Program: Submitted by Joe Gibowicz**

During our day together we focused our learning on Organizational Strength, Executive Functioning; also three staff (Shelagh Conway, Gabrielle Prosnitz, Kristin Ashburn) presented their R&D work on Evaluating and Expanding the Play of Preschoolers.

*Organizational Strength* – To create a culture of continued improvement in our program, we learned that we need to balance accountability with psychological safety. Creating an environment where educators can be comfortable not knowing, not being right, asking for help, making mistakes (and reporting them), and disagreeing are all important aspects of a successful program that continues to learn.

*Executive Functioning* – The staff broke into small groups and read an article on Executive Functioning. We examined the article using a text protocol, which encouraged participation by all involved in the activity. Within the small groups, each staff member had an opportunity to share a connection to the text and/or how it applies to their work, and to receive a response from the group. Following the small group work, we came back together, debriefed the process, and discussed if this approach could be helpful in our work together this year.

*Evaluating and Expanding the Play of Preschoolers R&D Summary* – Staff gave an overview on their R&D work, had hands on materials for the staff to explore, and had all staff complete a Play Survey.

**Conant School: Submitted by Damian Sugrue**

Conant spent the morning being trained in the incident prevention and de-escalation portions of Safety Care. Five staff members were trained as trainers over the summer, and we were able to break the staff into smaller groups for the training. After lunch, we met with the research team from the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development to be trained for our participation in the AIMS (Arthur Interactive Media Study) where "Buddy Pairs" of classrooms will work with interactive graphic novels to learn a research-based social curriculum while adding to the research itself.

**Douglas School: Submitted by Chris Whitbeck**

At Douglas the staff worked with John D'Auria for the morning. He helped us understand the latest thinking about creating a culture of continuous improvement. Based on this, we then worked with John to develop norms for working together at Douglas. In the afternoon a team of teachers and administrators introduced the staff to several of the principles of Responsive Classroom. We continued this work on Tuesday, as well as beginning to work on a revision of progress reports for Douglas parents.

**Gates School: Submitted by Lynne Newman**

Gates teachers spent the PL day attending a Responsive Classroom workshop. We learned more about the Responsive Classroom philosophy and are ready to implement Morning Meeting in all classrooms, K-6. A few valuable outcomes of Responsive Classroom teaching practices include: improved social skills and increased academic engagement, positive classroom climate, greater learner investment and independence, and fewer disruptive behaviors. All classroom, special education and lunch recess assistants participated in a one day Safety-Care training workshop. Safety-Care helps to provide staff with a better understanding of students' challenging behaviors. It also offers strategies to help prevent many behavioral incidents, as well as what to do if an incident does happen.

**McCarthy-Towne School: Submitted by David Krane**

During this all-day workshop, forty classroom teachers and specialists worked on updating Responsive Classroom techniques for the classroom and applying these same ideas to expected interactions between and among adults. As a school, we are seeking to increase collaboration between and among faculty, and the tenets of the Responsive Classroom work well in promoting this goal. As a social curriculum, Responsive Classroom ideas and philosophy can:

- Provide opportunities for children to know each other and to be known in the classroom.
- Generate and model class rules and guidelines for expected ethical behaviors.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn constructive ways to handle controversy and differences.

These teachings can also provide similar guidelines for adults working in a larger social context, such as our school. We designed the workshop to encourage conversation and reflection about our teaching practices, problems of practice, and solutions. It was a transformative day!

**Merriam School: Submitted by Ed Kaufman**

At Merriam School we hosted a variety of Professional Learning activities to support our teachers and assistants. Debbie Shein-Gerson, a math consultant, led a full-day workshop for classroom teachers and special educators about *Investigations*, the new math program being used this year at Merriam. Members of our faculty presented two morning workshops for assistants. Kerry Cusick, our reading specialist, led a literacy workshop for all of our classroom assistants. Katie Turner (our school counselor) and Tricia Kaminsky (our speech and language pathologist), co-led a workshop on de-escalation techniques and social thinking for our resource room special education assistants. Heather Haines, our district math specialist, led an *Investigations* overview for all of our assistants in the afternoon.

**R.J. Grey Junior High: Submitted by Andrew Shen**

At the Junior High, the opening Professional Day began with an all-staff meeting that not only reviewed some initial "nuts and bolts" (including introduction of new staff), but also presented RJ Grey's school improvement goals and areas of focus for professional learning time during the 2015-2016 school year. Our primary morning session introduced our school's intentions to explore areas of staff culture and the importance and impact that adult-to-adult relationships and engagement have on our work with, and for, students. This introduction involved an overview of the topic, as well as small group dialogue, to provide initial feedback and perspective on possible areas of focus for this work. The primary afternoon session was a presentation that outlined this year's inquiry work around our practices relating to homework. The goal for this year is to begin developing a shared understanding of why we assign homework and establishing some common expectations about balancing the needs of various disciplines and what is appropriate given the developmental age of our students. The last workshop session of the day was a "choice session" where several different breakout sessions were offered, ranging from using music in the classroom to developing student surveys for collecting feedback about courses to trainings for working with students who have visual or hearing impairments. The entire day involved all members of the RJ Grey staff, including classroom assistants.



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**Glenn A. Brand, Ed.D.**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

August 28, 2015

Dear

Regionalization, state standards and external expectations have all prompted the need to discuss what our Acton-Boxborough Regional School District values in terms of early childhood education. A committee of preschool and kindergarten teachers as well as principals and district personnel was formed to examine this question.

The committee split into two groups, each addressing an overarching domain - Play and Cognitive Development and Social/Emotional Development.

As part of the Social/Emotional Development domain, our small group has put together some questions we believe will help us determine trends and issues in our community associated with our youngest students' social/emotional wellness.

If you would also take a moment to complete this survey please, that would be very much appreciated. Thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact either of us if you have any questions or would like to discuss this project further.

Sincerely,

Glenn A. Brand, Superintendent of Schools

Deborah Bookis, Director of Curriculum and Assessment

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## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

### Ready to Learn: Acton-Boxborough Social and Emotional Learning 2015 - 2016

1. As classroom teachers, we are seeing pre-school/kindergarten students struggle with the social and emotional issues listed below. Please check off those that you are seeing as well:

- \*empathy/kindness
- \*anxiety/stress management
- \*body awareness
- \*self regulation
- \*establishing friends/connections
- \*cooperation/working with others
- \*conflict resolution
- \*disappointment
- \*perseverance

2. Of the list above, what do you think should be our primary focus?

3. Are you seeing any other trends not listed above?

4. What resources or communication do you share with families around any of the above issues?

5. Do you have any additional comments/ideas?