

# **C.T. DOUGLAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**



**October 2018**

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## Introduction

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee is pleased to present the educational plan for the C. T. Douglas Elementary School project. The educational plan is the culmination of four years of Master Planning which included a full review of facilities, evaluation of best options, and the development of a Long Range Strategic Plan. In December 2016, the district adopted a Long Range Strategic Plan with an updated Mission, Vision, and Values that focus on Wellness, Equity, and Engagement. Partnering with the MSBA on a new elementary school provides an opportunity to develop learning spaces that highlight collaboration, creativity, and curiosity for students. This partnership will also allow us to provide more equitable learning opportunities and increase engagement for all students.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District (ABRSD) has a unique elementary school “open enrollment” policy. While the district curriculum standards are based on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education frameworks, each school has the ability to determine its own school philosophy to meet these standards. Families are able to select the elementary school with a philosophy that best fits their family. A description of each school’s philosophy and educational practices are described in this Educational Program in the Curriculum Delivery Method and Practices section.

The School Committee policy related to open enrollment states, “The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee strives to provide high standards of educational excellence in all its elementary schools. Since no single teaching method is best for all students, the Committee supports the use of a variety of teaching methods and techniques that will achieve the prescribed curriculum objectives. It

follows that parents should have the opportunity to choose the school they think best fits the needs of their children subject to the availability of space and staff.” The Enrollment of Students policy and procedures are included in Appendix A of this Educational Program. The district's visioning process for this building project confirmed that teachers are utilizing varied teaching approaches to meet the unique needs of each individual student. As a result, it is important for the new school building to provide equitable opportunities across the facility for all students while designing spaces within the building to be used flexibly and adapt over time to a variety of teaching strategies and methods.

The District's open enrollment policy provides a unique opportunity to consolidate two schools into one facility allowing the benefits of shared common spaces. Since students from anywhere in the two towns can choose their elementary school programs, and transportation is provided, multiple programs can be co-located in one facility without disrupting current school assignments. The District currently has a successful model of two school programs consolidated in one facility (The Parker Damon Building) with the McCarthy-Towne School and the Merriam School programs. With over 1,000 students in one facility, McCarthy-Towne and Merriam are able to share large spaces (gym, library/media, cafeteria, health office, etc.) while maintaining their individual school program. There are benefits of some shared staff (custodians, food service staff, bus drivers, digital literacy, special education chairperson, etc.). There is even greater benefit in the collaborative relationships across similar roles (nursing, English learner educators, principals, assistant principals, counselors, psychologists, library/media, etc.). The District gathered significant community feedback through 14 public forums and two extensive surveys during the Master Planning process. See Exhibit G — ABRSD School Master Plan and Feasibility Study. This has been confirmed as a part of the PDP effort in Educational Visioning sessions from October 1-16, 2018; Community Forums on November 27, 2018 and November 29, 2018; and a community-wide survey in December 2018. The feedback and survey results from the November and December 2018 Forums and survey are included in this Educational Program in Appendix B. The feedback from the previous forums and survey in 2017 are also included in Appendix C.

The Gates and Douglas elementary schools are both over 50 years old, and they are currently located on a shared piece of school property in West Acton. They already share buses that drop students off at Gates and then go to Douglas or vice-versa. A consolidated building will reduce the drop-off and pick-up times for these students, reducing the time on buses for students in the morning and the afternoon. There are many homes in West Acton from which students walk to Gates or Douglas. In December 2018, in the final stages of considering multiple options for this project, the School Committee received over 100 emails confirming the desire to place a consolidated elementary school for Gates and Douglas, along with the districts' preschool program, on the Gates site. The community has expressed a preference for the economies of a shared facility along with the benefits of maintaining the Gates and Douglas programs within one facility. Feedback strongly supports building a new consolidated facility in West Acton on the Gates property. Students and families who currently attend Gates or Douglas will be able to attend the new school without disruption to those who can walk, and current bus time would be a little bit shorter since they will all be loading at one building.

The open enrollment policy allows students to attend elementary school in either town. The district is fully merged, and the six elementary schools are seen as equal options for students in the district. Currently, there are 2,267 elementary school students who live in Acton, and 91 of them (4%) attend Boxborough's Blanchard Memorial School. Currently, there are 418 students who live in Boxborough, and 51 (12%) of them attend school at one of the Acton elementary schools. One of the pros of putting the new consolidated elementary school with two programs in West Acton on the Gates property is because it is only ½ mile from Boxborough. This will give Boxborough families additional attractive and convenient options in their school selection process. Boxborough Town Meeting had a near unanimous vote in support of the Feasibility study, and outreach has begun in both towns for the Winter Special Town Meeting for the project funding.

## **ABRSD District Master Planning Process**

The District master planning process included the phases described below between 2016-2018.

### **A. Phase I Capital Improvement Plan**

The Master Planning process began in 2016 with a complete review of the district's eight school buildings, resulting in a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) listing all updates required over the next ten years. The district's three oldest elementary schools, Douglas, Gates, and Conant, were determined to be the most in need of renovation. These three schools were built 50+ years ago, and have not had any significant renovation. The district's Preschool program, a majority of which is currently housed in a former elementary school which was built in 1957, was also determined to be in significant need of relocation.

### **B. Phase II of the Master Plan**

Phase II included a full Educational Visioning process in the fall of 2016. These three day-long visioning sessions involved 80 stakeholders, including faculty, parents, and community members. There were several focus groups including Principals' workshops to outline educational priorities for any future facilities. At the end of this extensive master planning process, seven possible options were developed to comprehensively meet the needs of all district facilities.

### **C. Community Outreach**

After receiving the District Master Plan, the School Committee appointed a District Master Plan Review Committee to review the Master Plan and to organize significant community outreach for feedback about the seven options with a goal of narrowing down the options. Twelve public forums were held to gather feedback. The presentation was also made available to the community through the local cable television channel. A survey was distributed to gather feedback about grade configuration and to narrow down the options. A summary report and presentation was given to the School Committee. Documents from each of these phases are posted on [www.abschools.org](http://www.abschools.org) and can be considered attachments to this document.

#### D. Preferred Solution and Design Enrollment

After holding twelve community forums and collecting extensive survey feedback, the School Committee and the community supported a preferred solution for ***a “twin” elementary school to serve two of the district’s current older elementary schools as well as the district’s preschool program.*** The two building site options being considered during the feasibility phase are:

- *Existing Gates/Douglas Site:* a twin school on the current Gates or Douglas property that would include the Douglas and Gates schools, as well as the Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program
- *Existing Conant Site:* a twin school on the current Conant property that would include the Douglas and Conant schools, as well as the Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program

The MSBA has agreed to design enrollment numbers of 650 students if the facility is a single school for Douglas only; 990 students for a twin Douglas/Gates School; and 1015 students for a twin Douglas/Conant School. The Early Childhood Program section of the school would be built for up to 130 preschool students in addition to the elementary design enrollment numbers.

#### E. Long Range Strategic Plan

In December 2016, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee voted to adopt an updated long range strategic plan, which updated the district’s mission, vision, and values along with three primary goals related to Wellness, Equity, and Engagement. The educational plan for a new elementary school facility is rooted in the district’s newly updated mission, vision, and values.

#### F. Additional Visioning Process

In the fall of 2018, the district conducted a second round of visioning workshops as part of its Feasibility Study. Based on the 2016 Master Planning Process preferred vision for a building housing two elementary schools and the district’s preschool, these more recent visioning sessions allowed each school to review and renew the school’s individual identity and philosophy and how teaching and learning will change over time in a new facility. Consistent with the agreed-upon scope of the feasibility study, the district included a broad range of stakeholders from C.T. Douglas Elementary School, Paul P. Gates Elementary School, Luther Conant Elementary School, and the Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program. Stakeholders included students, families, faculty, and administrators as well as district administration, school committee, school building committee, and community representatives.

## Project Goals

As a result of the extensive master planning and visioning processes, ABRSD has outlined the following goals and priorities for a new elementary school facility:

- A school that highlights student engagement through innovative, collaborative, and flexible learning spaces.
- A new school with two unique elementary schools and room for a preschool that will allow each school to maintain an individual identity while benefiting from the economies of a shared facility.

- A library media center which is the hub of the school and is open and inviting for student learning and innovation.
- Small group instructional spaces to provide equitable learning experiences for the district's increasing population of high needs students. This includes spaces for occupational and physical therapy, speech and language, English language education, and special education programming.
- The district has received national recognition for sustainability and would like to see sustainability as an overarching goal of the new school building project. The building should source green, low VOC materials and provide abundant daylight to support health and wellness, and student learning. The building will serve as an engaging educational tool for our students to promote social responsibility, and it will provide multiple outdoor connections, gathering places and classrooms. The school building will be highly energy efficient with renewable energy generation on site (with a goal of net zero), as well as practical and cost effective to operate. The district is already partnering with energy providers to maximize grant opportunities at the beginning of the design process to provide the highest level of sustainability in a cost efficient manner.
- For the first time, the ABRSD preschool will be able to move into an accessible, warm and inviting space for young children. A new facility will enable preschool students to have a much better social-emotional and whole-child instructional program if it shares a facility with elementary schools. Approximately half of the preschool children are students with Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). If the preschool shares a facility with elementary school(s), preschoolers will be able to participate in art, music, physical education, student groupings with other grades, staff collaborative time, etc.
- ABRSD's open enrollment policy works best when each school can support an equal number of classroom sections. Each family of incoming kindergarteners selects the school that they want their child to attend. Final kindergarten assignments are determined through a lottery process. If each school has three kindergarten classrooms, the choices balance out much better than if one school has two kindergarten classrooms and another school has four kindergarten classrooms. A new building with a balanced number of classrooms will improve the equitability of the open enrollment and lottery processes significantly.

## **ABRSD District Vision, Mission, and Core Values**

### **Vision Statement**

The **vision** of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District is to provide high-quality educational opportunities that inspire a community of learners.

### **Mission Statement**

The **mission** is to develop engaged, well-balanced learners through collaborative, caring relationships.

## Core Value Statements

- **Wellness** - We partner with families to prioritize social-emotional wellness, which is necessary for learning and developing resilience
- **Equity** - We ensure all students have equitable access to programs and curricula to reach their potential
- **Engagement** - We provide engaging educational opportunities where students develop passion and joy for learning

Each of the District's schools operates with the District Vision, Mission, and Core Values Statements at the center of all educational decisions and practices. These tenets remained at the forefront of development for this educational plan. The District is hopeful that this building project will provide the appropriate and innovative design features that will support us to move forward with 21st-century teaching and learning practices.

## Grade and School Configuration Policies

As of October 1, 2018 ABRSD serves 5,654 students in preschool through grade 12. 85% of students live in Acton and 15% live in Boxborough. Acton-Boxborough Regional High School (ABRHS) has 1,837 students enrolled in grades 9-12, R. J. Grey Jr. High School (RJGJHS) has 923 students enrolled in grades 7 and 8, and the six K-6 elementary schools have 2,706 students enrolled. There are 105 students enrolled in the early childhood program and there are 83 students in out of district placements.

Most of the schools within the district are located on campuses with multiple schools rather than spread out across the two towns. The main school campus, includes the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, the R. J. Grey Jr. High School, the ABRSD Administration Building (which houses the Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program, Central Office, and the ABRSD Community Education Offices), and the Parker Damon Building, which houses the McCarthy-Towne and Merriam elementary schools. This original "twin school" was built in 2004 and provides a great deal of experience for the district to use in planning a new twin school. Gates and Douglas are located about a half mile west of the main campus on a shared West Acton school campus. Luther Conant Elementary is located approximately one mile east of the main campus across Route 2, and Blanchard Memorial School is located three miles west of the main school campus in Boxborough.

ABRSD's open enrollment policy provides parents the opportunity to choose the elementary school where their child attends. If there are more requests for a school than space available, there is a lottery. Priority is given to families who meet any of the following criteria:

1. Sibling priority - students whose older brother(s) or sister(s) attend the school
2. Walkers - students within a one-mile safe walk to school
3. Special education - students with IEPs for specialized programs located in a specific school
4. Hometown guarantee - students have a priority to attend a school in their hometown



The open enrollment policy allows students from anywhere in either town to enroll in any of the six elementary schools. However, students in both towns have a hometown guarantee, where elementary students who live in Boxborough are guaranteed a spot at Blanchard Memorial School if they choose, and children who live in Acton are guaranteed a spot at an Acton elementary school if they choose. Exceptions to this may be made for special education reasons or for other reasons as determined by the Superintendent.

Once a student is enrolled in an elementary school, his/her younger siblings will have a priority to attend that elementary school. While the district attempts to place children in the first choice school, this is not always possible. When families enroll in Kindergarten, students who have priority to a specific school are placed first. The remaining students are placed in schools that have enough seats. Any school that is over-subscribed will have a lottery. All students who have chosen a particular school as their first choice will go into the lottery for that school, and students who are not placed in that school are placed on a waitlist. Once all first choices have been placed, students who have not been placed are placed in their second choice school if there is space. If there is no space in their second choice school, they are placed in their third choice school, and so on. There are generally 15-25 students who are not placed in their first choice school in each entering kindergarten class of 300-330.

Each summer, after schools are aware of students who are moving out of Acton or Boxborough, students on waitlists are offered the opportunity to move to their first choice school if there is space available. Once students on waitlists have been placed, new students are placed based on their choices in schools with available seats. Students who move in after kindergarten or during the school year may not be able to be placed in their top choice schools because some schools and classrooms will already be full.

The open enrollment system allows the district to balance class sizes across the district. Rather than limit the placement of students to their neighborhood school, the District is able to place students across the district in any classrooms that have space. The addition of classrooms in a new building will allow all six schools to be more balanced with more appropriate spaces. The overcrowding the district has experienced has impacted all six elementary schools. There are no available classrooms in any school, reducing available space for special education classrooms and space for specialized instruction. Even though a new school will house two of the district's six elementary schools, the additional square footage will allow all six schools to improve learning spaces.

Currently, Douglas and Gates have two classrooms at several grade levels instead of three. When this happens, one of the other schools has had to put four classrooms at some grade levels even though they were only built for three classrooms at each grade. This has made all of the schools overcrowded. A new school would allow there to be three classrooms in each grade at all six schools. It will also allow students to be placed equitably during the lottery, which will result in shorter waitlists than when there are only two kindergartens at one school and four at another.

## Enrollment: October 1, 2018

School	Grade Configuration	10/1/2018 Enrollment
Blanchard Memorial Elementary	K-6	464
Conant Elementary	K-6	449
Douglas Elementary	K-6	405
Gates Elementary	K-6	376
McCarthy-Towne Elementary	K-6	520
Merriam Elementary	K-6	492
Total Elementary (6 schools)	K-6	2,706
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School	9-12	1,837
R. J. Grey Jr. High School	7-8	923
Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program	Preschool	105
Other (Out of District)	PreK-12	83
Total	PreK-12	5,654

## Class Size Guidelines

The School Committee has a commitment to provide the highest quality education for the students in the District. The Committee recognizes that desirable class sizes are a necessary part of the growth and development of individual students. Therefore, the Committee recommends that elementary class sizes are kept within the following ranges. Attainment within these class sizes shall, however, be dependent on space and budget considerations.

Grade Level	Class Size Range
Kindergarten	18-20
Grades 1-3	20-22
Grades 4-6	22-24

Through the annual enrollment processes, students are placed in schools with an attempt to balance

class sizes across the district.

## Kindergarten

The ABRSD kindergarten teachers employ a play-based approach to learning. Play is an integral part of the social curriculum, providing students with opportunities to take turns, share materials, and solve social conflicts with peers. Teachers guide students through conflict resolution using a question-based approach, empowering students to solve problems independently. Teachers help students develop an understanding that the learning process is valued as much as the final products created. Establishing and maintaining a strong classroom community where each member feels valued and safe is an essential part of the Kindergarten curriculum. Current sections are:

	Conant	Douglas	Gates
Half-Day Sections	1	1	1
Full-day Sections	2	1	1

## School Scheduling Methods

The Gates, Conant and Douglas Schools host students in kindergarten through grade 6. Doors are open to students at 8:30 am and the instructional school day begins at 8:50 am. Students are dismissed at 3:20 pm. Students receive instruction in ELA (Literacy), mathematics, science (STE), and social studies from their classroom teacher in their assigned classroom. At grade six, teachers may specialize for one of the disciplines or each may instruct in one unit of a discipline. Students rotate throughout the day. Within the context of open enrollment, each school makes a decision about whether or not sixth grade students rotate classrooms. All sixth grade teachers are certified to teach elementary general education. At three of the AB elementary schools (Blanchard, Conant, McCarthy-Towne), one teacher teaches Math, another teaches ELA, and the third teacher teaches science and social studies. At Douglas and Merriam, students do not rotate classrooms for subjects, they stay with their teacher for all classes except for Art, Music, and P.E. At Gates, one teacher teaches Math and the other teaches ELA. They both teach Science and Social Studies to their homeroom students.

The District has a systematic approach for implementing reading interventions and supports for students with academic needs. The schools begin each day with a twenty-minute period dedicated to Morning Meeting based on *Responsive Classroom* principles and practices as a means of addressing social and emotional learning. Each general education class has each special discipline - visual art, performing art (music), P.E. and health, and library/media - at least once per week, and sometimes for additional periods on a rotating basis, so each space is used 25-30 times or more per week. These disciplines are scheduled, to the extent possible, so that educators on a grade level team have a common collaborative

time once a week. This also allows time for school leadership to meet with individual grade levels. Students in grades 5 and 6 also participate in a weekly ensemble (strings, band or chorus).

Instructional time allotments across the three schools are as follows:

**Classroom-based instructional disciplines:**

	<b>Kindergarten (Half - Full Day)</b>	<b>Grade 1-2</b>	<b>Grades 3-6</b>
<b>ELA (Literacy)</b>	30-60 min/day	90 min/day	90-120 min/day
<b>Mathematics</b>	30-60 min/day	60 min/day	60 min/day
<b>Science, Technology and Engineering (STE)</b>	Investigative, center based	30 min/day 3 times/week	45 min/day 3 times/week
<b>Social Studies</b>	30 min/day 2-3 times/week	30 min/day 3 times/week	45 min/day 3 times/week

**Specialized disciplines:**

	<b>Kindergarten (Half - Full Day)</b>	<b>Grade 1-6</b>
<b>Visual Arts</b>	30-45 min/week	45 min/week
<b>Performing Arts (Music)</b>	30-45 min/week	45 min/week
<b>P.E. and Health</b>	30-45 min/week	45 min/week
<b>Library/Media</b>	30-45 min/week	45 min/week

Acton-Boxborough's elementary school schedules prioritize the needs of diverse learners, provide uninterrupted instructional time, and allow educators time to regularly collaborate to meet students' needs. Schedules are built with the district's core values of wellness, equity and engagement. Class schedules must allow for a variety of whole-class, small-group, partner, and individualized instructional options, as well as time for educators to collaborate within and across grade levels and subject areas. Flexible learning spaces are paramount for meeting the needs of diverse learners, for encouraging the love of learning, and to foster curiosity and creativity. Learning spaces should support students' ability to learn and practice skills such as digital literacy, communication and collaboration.

## Teaching Methodology and Structure

### Administrative and Academic Organization/Structure

Douglas, Conant, and Gates elementary schools are each led by a fulltime principal and assistant principal with teachers organized into grade level teams. This structure, with an administrative team, will remain the same in the new building.

### Curriculum Delivery Methods and Practices

#### All Elementary Schools

Across all elementary schools, classrooms are heterogeneously grouped by grade level, and teachers use a variety of whole-class, small group, partner, and individual work to engage learners. Each teacher in grades K-5 presents all content material, and some sixth grade teachers are discipline-specific.

Specialized services, which include English language education, special education, and reading instruction, are a combination of push-in inclusion support and pull-out instruction. Additionally, trained assistants supplement mathematics instruction.

Within each learning community, the mathematics, ELA, STE, social studies, and social-emotional curricula are delivered in general education classrooms. ABRSD wants teachers designing lessons, assessment, and instructional spaces based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), so that students can learn from instructional practices and materials that are accessible to them, including the ways in which they take in information, process as they learn, show what they have learned, and engage with instruction and materials.

The Department of Educational Technology supports digital learning in each of the schools by focusing on the goals and strategic action items presented in the [2021 District Technology Plan](#). The plan focuses on future-ready learning, universal design for learning (UDL) and instructional practices in support of the [District Curriculum Accommodation Plan](#) and is aligned with the District's Long Range Strategic Plan. The four key elements of the plan include Teaching & Professional Learning, Digital Learning, Leadership & Culture, and Infrastructure, Productivity, & Innovation.

The District envisions extended learning areas shared by general education classrooms within a learning community and large enough to hold an entire grade level. The extended learning area would provide opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning, multi-class presentations and gatherings, as well as student break out space. Similarly, shared small group rooms would allow break out opportunities for passively supervised independent small group work. The District also envisions STEAM Learning Labs for more hands-on and project-based learning as described in the STE curriculum section. To further collaboration among educator teams, multi-sized flexible conferencing spaces will yield opportunities to create collaborative lessons, units, projects, and investigations, provide the ability for

timely student feedback and support, and space for professional learning as well as individual educator workspace.

The District believes that climate and school culture have an effect on the success of social and emotional as well as academic learning. There is a desire to make large schools feel smaller and more connected while focusing on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, community building, student wellness, and engagement. To achieve this, staff and students are organized into learning communities.

Within each learning community, the mathematics, ELA, STE, social studies, and social-emotional curriculum are delivered in general education classrooms. However, there are very limited spaces for students to collaborate, whole grade meetings and presentations, and areas for project-making that occur over time and require materials and larger spaces to be completed. Thus, the District envisions extended learning areas shared by general education classrooms within a learning community and large enough to hold an entire grade level. The extended learning area would provide opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning, multi-class presentations and gatherings, as well as student break out space. Similarly, shared small group rooms would allow break out opportunities for passively supervised independent small group work. The District also envisions STEAM Learning Labs for more hands-on and problem-based learning as described in the STE curriculum section. To further collaboration among educator teams, multi-sized flexible conferencing spaces will yield opportunities to create collaborative lessons, units, projects, and investigations, provide the ability for timely student feedback and support, and space for professional learning as well as individual educator workspace.

## **Individual School Curriculum Delivery Methods and Practices**

### **Douglas**

At Douglas School, the vision is that children feel joyful, valued, brave, full of wonder, and experience a deep sense of pride. The school creates experiences that empower students to do amazing things that make a difference in the world. Meeting children where they are is critical in building skills for students to be creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial young adults. Douglas staff understand that students prosper best with a broad curriculum that celebrates, accommodates, and nurtures their academic and individual diversity. Instruction is provided in small and large groups and on an individual basis. The faculty utilizes methods and approaches employed that include balanced reading programs, direct instruction, project-based learning, team teaching, and partnering across grades. Staff members teach skills, concepts, and content in heterogeneous groups and each teacher instructs in all curricular areas except art, music, and P.E. Twice a year, students prepare for and participate in public exhibitions of learning, which are the culmination of semester-long projects based on an essential question. These often involve partnerships with community members such as architects, historians, librarians, or naturalists.

The school has 1:1 computers for students in grades 3-6. Students are active and resourceful learners who are immersed in meaningful, interesting, and integrated curriculum work. Art, music, and physical education both support and are supported by our language arts, math, science, and social studies curriculum. Grade level jobs include communication, recycling, the school store, horticulture, environmental awareness, a school post office, and community service.

Douglas' teaching materials include a strong phonics program, children's literature, Guided Reading, Scott Foresman Reading Street Curriculum; the Investigations math curriculum; science units from TERC, as well as other investigations, experiments, and nature walks; social studies units, literature, texts, research endeavors, and community resources. Douglas also has 1:1 computers for students' grades 3-6. Students are active and resourceful learners who are immersed in meaningful, interesting, and integrated curriculum work.

Art, music, and physical education both support and are supported by our language arts, math, science, and social studies curriculum. Grade level jobs include communication, recycling, the school store, horticulture, environmental awareness, a school post office, and community service. The two main focus areas for the Douglas staff this year are to enhance the Douglas community through the use of Response Classroom protocols and to focus on Math instruction, while fostering a respectful environment of belonging and safety for all students, staff and parents.

Douglas attracts an international population. Douglas takes every opportunity to learn from and celebrate our diversity, including our 27% international student population representing 22 different countries. Douglas has a strong social justice curriculum and strives to teach children to be caring and intellectually reflective citizens; who can recognize problems both locally and globally and realize that they can each affect change.

The Douglas community has articulated academic, social, and personal goals for students and has developed expected behavioral priorities addressing the areas of health and safety, respect, pride and responsibility, and trust. Students learn about human commonalities amidst their differences. Once a month, the school assembles in a Community Meeting to discuss and reinforce our values, to enjoy our talents and interests, to engage in challenges that build community, and to sing together.

## **Gates**

*The Gates School Core Values are: Generosity, Acceptance, Trust & Respect, Enthusiasm, and Scholarship.*

**G = Generosity****A = Acceptance****T = Trust & Respect****E = Enthusiasm****S = Scholarship**

*We demonstrate our generosity through random acts of kindness and community service projects.*

*Everyone is entitled to be treated with respect, warmth and sensitivity. We respect and appreciate others and value differences among people.*

*All members of the Gates Community will treat each other with trust and respect.*

*We show enthusiasm on our School Spirit Days and at Gates all-school monthly meetings*

*All children can learn, so we hold them to high standards with the expectation that all students will work to their potential*

Gates classrooms are heterogeneously grouped by grade level and teachers use a variety of whole class, small group, partner, and individual work to engage learners. Each teacher in Kindergarten through fifth grade presents all the content material. Sixth-grade students move as a homeroom for math and reading each day. Technology is an important tool in allowing students to access knowledge. Students in grades 3-6 are given a Chromebook to use in their classroom for the school year. Formal and informal assessments include class discussions, individual assignments, projects, quizzes, tests, and teacher observation.

At Gates, *Responsive Classroom* is used as an approach to teaching that focuses on helping students develop their academic, social, and emotional skills in a learning environment where students can do their best learning.

#### Elementary Practices (K-6)

- Morning Meeting - Everyone in the classroom gathers in a circle at the beginning of each school day and participate with a greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message.
- Establish Rules - Teacher and students work together to identify individual learning goals for the school year and establish rules needed to help everyone meet their goals.
- Energizers - Short, fun whole class activities used as movement breaks in lessons.
- Quiet time - Brief, relaxed time of transition after specials and lunch.
- Closing Circle - A classroom meeting at the end of the day that promotes reflection and celebration.



Go Math! is the Gates math curriculum that is aligned with the Common Core math standards and is being taught to students in grades K - 6. In language arts, teachers assess students by using the Developmental Reading Assessment. Students are divided into small, guided reading groups with children who share similar abilities. Gates has a guided reading library collections of fiction and non-fiction text. In addition to the guided reading library, teachers use a variety of resources such as Words their Way, Foundations phonics program, and novels. Lucy Calkins, Empowering Writers and the Six Traits model are applied in teaching writing skills. System-wide topics are covered in science and social studies. Learning is enhanced through related field trips and special in-school presentations.

The goal of the Gates 2018 - 2019 School Improvement Plan is to continue to Grow a Caring Community through Civility, Respect and Kindness. There are school-wide activities that promote enthusiasm, school spirit and a caring community that supports one another. Each month the school participates in an All School Meeting where students gather together and celebrate core values through song, performances, stories, and plays. All classrooms participate in book buddies where younger students are paired with older students to celebrate literacy. Students are proud to have flags from their countries displayed in the cafeteria. Student Council leads the school with a variety of community service projects throughout the year. Gates students take pride in giving back to our community.

In order to better understand Acton-Boxborough's open enrollment, it may be helpful to see a brief overview of the educational philosophy of the four Acton-Boxborough Elementary Schools that are not part of the preferred solution for the new consolidated elementary school.

## **McCarthy-Towne**

The McCarthy-Towne Elementary School shares the Parker Damon School Building with the Merriam Elementary School. McCarthy-Towne (McT) was founded in 1971 as "the pilot school." Since the beginning, McT has had an integrated arts curriculum and extensive parent volunteerism. The evolution of the McT philosophy resulted in the former Acton Public Schools becoming an open enrollment school district. At McT, students are trusted to take an active role in their own education and are given the responsibility for learning independently, solving problems, making decisions and being part of building a healthy classroom community. McT is also a Project School, connected with the Teachers College of Columbia University Reading and Writing Project. Consultants from Teachers College work closely with our teachers over the course of the year as we seek to implement best practices in literacy from Kindergarten through Sixth Grade. McCarthy-Towne uses integrated curricula and a thematic approach in the classroom. Students will often combine math, language arts, writing, science, music, art, engineering and geography in a unit of study. Our philosophy is to present materials in a variety of ways in order to accommodate different learning styles, to help students develop their own set of problem-solving strategies and to support individual student goals, strengths and needs. McT students, teachers and administrators all address each other by their first name.

## **Merriam**

Merriam (“Holding Community at Our Center”) is structured to promote community, collaboration, and creativity. Merriam is organized into looping classes that stay together with the same teacher for two years whenever possible. Students and teachers actively participate in a project-based curriculum with an emphasis on the core values of respect, persistence and risk-taking. Merriam School is committed to creating and sustaining an environment that promotes academic excellence, encourages social development, fosters emotional well-being, and instills a passion for life-long learning. We strive to combine the thought provoking enriching qualities of a children’s museum with the nurturing support of a family and the learning structure of a school. We accomplish this by holding community at our center: Merriam parents, teachers, and students learn and work closely together.

Merriam students are active participants as they gain skills and learn to problem solve and to be independent thinkers in all areas of their studies. Students are assigned projects as a means to integrate and deepen different areas of learning. Through these projects, students not only learn a great deal of information, but also how to set goals, work in groups, and present their learning to an audience. Both teachers and students are actively involved in the assessment process throughout the project. Merriam parents come to three conferences during the year to hear about their children’s progress. They meet with the classroom teachers in both beginning and end of year conferences. Mid-year, Merriam has a unique student-led conference. All students in grades kindergarten through six reflect on their goals, expectations, and progress, and then organize this material into an informative, rewarding presentation for their parents. It is often a highlight of the year for both parents and children.

## **Blanchard**

The Blanchard Memorial School is an educational environment where children are challenged to grow academically, emotionally, physically and socially. It is the endeavor of all members of the school community to nurture and respect each individual student’s strengths and interests. The goal is to provide each child with the values, knowledge, critical thinking experiences, and skills needed to achieve full potential in a technologically advanced world. Blanchard’s STARR values reflect the priorities of our learning community. Support, teamwork, attitude, respect, and responsibility are all values which the families, staff, and students at Blanchard Memorial School feel help to create a nurturing, inclusive environment in which everyone feels welcome.

The Blanchard Memorial School provides a diverse and balanced curriculum. This curriculum includes a core that specifies the knowledge and skills that all students are to attain. All of the programs at Blanchard also contain Response to Intervention (RtI) supports, an opportunity for math vocabulary development and discourse, equitable access for diverse learners, technology integration, and capacity for differentiation. Blanchard has an extensive music program with Chorus, Band, and Strings. The Blanchard Memorial Elementary Band has been one of the only elementary bands winning awards and performing in state-wide concerts. The Blanchard Memorial School operates on the premise that home and school form an intrinsic bond that produces the necessary supportive atmosphere for student success. Our hope is that families and community members feel sincerely welcomed into our educational family. Teachers feel that it is only with strong family and community support that educators can be truly successful. The exemplary school must be seen as a valuable community resource that provides unique learning space and risk-taking opportunities for young and mature alike. Our doors remain open to all.

## Conant

Instruction at Conant (“Where the whole child is the whole idea”) is designed to allow all students, no matter what their learning style, strengths, or challenges may be, the opportunity to experience success. The teachers at Conant match instructional methods with the needs of the children in front of them. Students at Conant experience project-based, learning, cooperative learning, independent challenges, long-term projects, varied assessments and differentiated opportunities to share their knowledge. Technology is available to all students and is used as a tool for learning and creation not simply a fun activity or tool for the consumption of information. Because of our rich curriculum, technological assets, well developed and thoughtfully acquired curricular materials and more importantly the ability of our teachers to vary instructional methodologies, all students at Conant experience the joys of success through strong effort and become internally motivated to learn rather than motivated by external factors like grade.

At Conant, a combination of inclusion and pull-out support services is utilized for students requiring special education services. In addition to special education supports, our math and ELA programs are also supplemented by tutors so that, at each grade level, we provide both instructional support for struggling students as well as enrichment opportunities at each grade level. Special educators, general educators, and specialists collaborate to ensure students are receiving appropriate services. The existing building lacks adequate small group instruction break-out and special education spaces, and the spaces that do exist are not easily accessible to all grades and classrooms. Additional and better small group and break out spaces distributed throughout the building are required in order for us to better meet current program goals and ensure educators are collaborating to best support students.

## District-Wide Curriculum Delivery Methods and Practices

### Mathematics

ABRSD believes that student mathematics learning is rooted in discourse and collaboration with peers and staff and is tied to tasks that are challenging. Students should have the opportunity through appropriately challenging tasks to connect the mathematical content standards to the standards for mathematical practice (mathematical habits of mind).

The District’s elementary mathematics instruction, which is delivered for 60 minutes daily by grade level teachers in the general classroom, is inviting, engaging, and dynamic. Students are encouraged to participate in mathematical dialogue with their teachers and peers. Groups collaborate to make meaning of different situations, make conjectures, and defend their arguments. Teachers foster an environment that builds student confidence and enables them to become independent thinkers who can problem solve and work collaboratively with peers in different situations. The district has engaged in significant professional learning with Jo Boaler and her work with Mathematical Mindsets. This work permeates classrooms with students collaborating to creatively solve mathematical challenges. Flexible learning spaces can contribute to learning opportunities for students in mathematics. Small groups of students need to be able to work in varied spaces to creatively. Manipulatives should be available in

each classroom, as well as opportunities for hands on learning experiences. Many classrooms utilize rug or floor space during this time. While some students work in groups, others work independently on a formative task or pre-test. To culminate a math session, teachers bring the entire class back to a whole group setting and engage in conversation or complete a formative assessment. The district budget has included a multi-year plan to add a STEM Coach/Specialist (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to each elementary school. This staff will be in place before the new school opens. The STEM Coach/Specialist will work with teachers to model lessons and oversee the new STEAM labs.

## English Language Arts (ELA)

The District is dedicated to the development of lifelong readers and writers through the use of balanced literacy instruction that incorporates all components of literacy instruction. It incorporates explicit and implicit teaching of research-based instructional practices including reader's and writer's workshop. Students are provided with ample time to practice their developing skills as well as transfer knowledge and ideas between/across all content areas. The motivation for an interdisciplinary approach to literacy is the extensive research establishing that students who wish to be "life" ready must be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas.

The ELA curriculum exposes students to a rich diversity of high-quality, authentic literature from multiple genres, cultures, and time periods. The K - 6 standards include expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language applicable to a range of disciplines, including ELA, social studies, science (STE), mathematics, the arts, and comprehensive health. ABRSD approaches literacy instruction as a shared responsibility within the school.

Consistent with other disciplines, flexible learning spaces will help to foster the love of reading, creative writing, and collaboration and communication among learners. Each classroom is a Literacy-Rich Environment that encompasses a wide variety of books at various levels and incorporates many genres. Bookshelves should be at an age appropriate height and the area should be inviting.

- There should be wall space for anchor charts, comfortable seating, lots of natural light, and inviting baskets filled with high-quality literature.
- Audio books and headphones should be available for students.
- Books in multiple languages should be available to represent the diversity within the classroom.
- Titles that represent diverse cultures should be available so all children can see themselves within the pages of the books that are read.
- Early childhood classrooms should have plenty of space for role play and imaginary play with literacy materials available (ex. dining area with menus, grocery area with shopping lists, etc.).
- An area should be set aside for dramatic interpretation of literature and drama that includes a stage, microphone, technology to record performances, and a seating area for an audience.
- Adaptable classroom layout that can be easily reconfigured based on what the students are working on.

- Tables (rather than desks) should include various options: high tables, low tables, round and square tables - a variety to promote collaboration when students work in small groups or pairs.
- A designated space where students can gather for mini-lessons, read alouds, and group discussions is essential. Incorporating a rug and comfortable seating is desired.
- Flexible seating to give choice of where to sit and what to sit on will promote students' ability to act on their natural instincts to move their bodies. Large pillows, couches, bean-bags, yoga balls, stools and tables are options.
- Access to Technology: Students should have access to iPads and/or Chrome books to support instruction and be available for students for research purposes.
- A book room is needed for guided reading lessons that are neatly organized and easily accessible by educators for small group lessons. A QR reader and Chromebook/iPad should be available for checking in/out sets of texts for easily tracking materials. This should be located in an easily-accessible and welcoming area with a small seating area for educators to preview books or work in small groups/partners to preview books and discuss lesson design.
- Smaller breakout spaces/offices will be needed for literacy specialists.

## Science, Technology and Engineering (STE)

The purpose of science, technology and engineering (STE) education at ABRSD is to foster students' curiosity and creativity while developing foundational understandings and engagement in the science and engineering fields. Investigations involve the integration of STE practices and disciplinary core ideas such as students working like scientists and engineers.

At the K-6 level, Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) is currently taught using the 5-E Inquiry approach: students engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate scientific questions/phenomena and engineering problems. Over the past four years, teams of Acton-Boxborough educators have used the 5-E framework to develop many of our own STE investigations (units) to meet the 2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework. These units adhere to the nine guiding principles for relevance, rigor, and coherence in the 2016 MA STE Curriculum Framework.

For the last two years, a district-wide curriculum committee has been developing a new district vision and plan for STEAM education, PreK-12. Our working definition of STEAM is: *An interdisciplinary, collaborative and inclusive approach to learning that integrates science, technology, engineering, the arts and/or mathematics. Disciplinary concepts are embedded in real-world problem-solving that promotes creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and communication.*

STEAM learning is also highly connected to our district core values:

- Wellness - mindset as a learner; feel success in creating; play and joy
- Equity - multiple ways to access knowledge/information and to express learning/understanding; challenges for all students
- Engagement - connection to real world; relevance

For each grade level we are currently identifying the opportunities in various disciplines for students to engage in designated STEAM learning experiences. For example, in second grade students may experience STEAM learning as they work on science, technology, engineering, and the arts as they create a way to send a signal using sound or light.

The goal of the STEAM plan is to continue inquiry-based instruction in science and technology/engineering while encouraging greater integration of STE with mathematics, computer science, literacy, and the arts to have students work as real scientists and engineers on integrated projects. This year and for the next couple of years, we will be hiring a K-6 STEM coach for each elementary school to better meet the learning needs of all of our students and more effectively implement the MA curriculum frameworks for STE, Mathematics, and Digital Literacy/Computer Science. This position also designates a person who would be responsible for coordinating and scheduling use of the STEAM Learning Labs as well as co-facilitating the learning experiences with other educators (including classroom teachers, arts educators, library/media specialists, and technology integration specialists, depending on the particular project). Classes of students would visit the lab while working on particular STEAM projects/experiences, likely for several days to a week at a time.

The STEAM Learning Lab would allow the space and time for each classroom of students and educators to engage in several integrated STEAM learning project experiences each year. Each project experience would be scheduled over a period of days or weeks in the STEAM lab. With 1,000 students, the school would need two STEAM labs. The school will also have two STEM coaches to facilitate the labs and work with classroom teachers to design the projects and co-teach in the STEAM lab. We would expect each STEAM lab to be scheduled 21-24 periods per week, to support each classroom. The two STEAM labs would house a variety of different tools and resources for students to utilize while solving real-world problems, including: fabrication equipment (such as hand tools and building materials), electronics (such as circuitry equipment), 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional arts/craft supplies (such as clay, glue, paper, and tape), and digital devices and tools (such as laptops and robotics hardware/software). Safety equipment would include a sanitizer cabinet for safety goggles and a first aid kit. The STEAM Learning Lab would function as a collaborative work space with movable furniture to allow flexible and open spaces for engineering and creative design work. The lab would also function as a sharing space with multiple areas to display, share, and discuss student work as it is in progress.

In the elementary schools, technology is currently widely available in each classroom. Students in younger grades have access to iPad centers and third- through sixth-graders have 1-to-1 access to a ChromeBooks. At this time, ChromeBooks are stored in classroom carts and remain at school. Each elementary classroom is equipped with Audio/Visual equipment which includes an interactive whiteboard with speakers and mounted short-throw or ceiling mounted projectors. All full-time, certified educators receive a district-issued laptop device and a document camera.

Some classrooms are equipped with FM capabilities based upon student needs and/or building-based improvement projects completed by individual principals. The district will consider providing assisted listening technology in each classroom for hearing impaired accessibility, as well as general use

throughout educational spaces within the proposed project. Modern acoustic technology will be installed throughout the building to improve learning and social experiences for all students. Special Education areas are equipped with technology tools that provide accessibility features based on student Individualized Education Plans and/or programmatic needs. All buildings have 100% wireless coverage and are connected with 10GB uplinks back to the main network MDF located at the RJ Grey Junior High School.

### **Science, Technology and Engineering: Flexible Learning Spaces**

Based on the most recent curriculum redesign, space for educators and students to conduct experiments and inquiry work with STE investigations will be needed. STE instructional spaces will ideally include flexible spaces as well as the following design components that allow for STE instruction to be successfully delivered within the general classroom and in Extended Learning Areas or STEAM Learning Labs:

- Water available in every classroom and at multiple locations in the STEAM Learning Lab (or extended learning areas). At least one sink should be a deep/work sink to facilitate cleaning specimens and glassware and filling of large basins of water for activities like density investigations.
- Electricity safely available at each workstation via outlets on the floor. This is important for activities involving laptops, other digital technology (digital microscopes, digital probes, etc).
- The cabinetry should include some large, deep floor-to-ceiling units to hold the district-made STE investigations stored in large (24" deep) containers and large-scale models when not in use. These areas would also allow for experimentation with plants or animals in various simulated "environments."
- Ample counter space is necessary to put projects such as plants, posters, models, and experimental set up aside between classes.
- The room should be large enough to allow flexible workstation configurations and a rug area to facilitate whole group instruction, such as debriefing and making meaningful discussion after STE activities.
- All rooms should have light-blocking shades for activities involving light and waves.
- Furniture should include adjustable height tables on wheels that can be moved to create multiple student group configurations and stools that promote core strength.
- In addition to indoor areas for STE learning, students should also regularly engage with and explore the environment outside of the classrooms. Easy access to, and views of, the outdoors, along with open-air meeting spaces where students can sit, listen, write in journals, and debrief, are essential bases for outdoor STE investigations.

Extended learning spaces would allow us to increase project-based learning opportunities. Schools should incorporate numerous "green building" features to improve the overall efficiency and sustainability of the facility. ABRSD would like these features labeled and identified for students as a real-world application of science, technology, and engineering.

## **Social Studies**

The primary purpose of history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world. The future of democracy depends on students' development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to embrace democracy's potential while recognizing its challenges and inherent dilemmas. The curriculum responds to current scholarship and includes features designed to help students develop the skills to participate in and perhaps lead a society that will be more demographically and culturally diverse than any democratic society of the past.

The 2018 Framework includes new components designed to strengthen students' skills for informed citizenship and political participation. Standards for history and social science practice emphasize the following skills:

- Formulating questions
- Conducting research
- Evaluating sources
- Synthesizing information

Standards for literacy in history and social science set expectations for analytical reading and logical writing and speaking, skills essential to political equality and civic engagement.

ABRSD's social studies curriculum integrates the Guiding Principles from the 2018 MA History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, which combines the learning of content and skills in the study of history, geography, economics, civics, and government. Through the implementation of the History and Social Science curriculum, students become accustomed to being interviewers, investigators, history detectives, and researchers.

Literature rich classrooms representative of diverse cultures contributes to a strong learning environment in Social Studies and History. Images and artifacts that demonstrate social studies concepts help to shape students' identities and build a sense of community. The flexible learning spaces described with other subject areas are equally important in the learning of Social Studies.

## **World Language and English Learners**

World Language Instruction at Acton-Boxborough formally starts in seventh grade. Currently, the elementary schools do not have world languages as part of the curriculum. While 4.8% of ABRSD's students are English Learner's, the students speak more than 30 different languages. There isn't a large cohort of students who speak any one language for a bi-lingual or multi-lingual school.

## **Academic Support Programming Spaces**



Each elementary school has a reading specialist/coach who provides intervention support to regular education students, and who also works with teachers to model and co-teach literacy lessons in classrooms. In the new consolidated school, there will be two reading specialist coaches. Each reading specialist/coach will provide a space to work with groups of 6-8 students.

## **Student Guidance and Support Services**

The District goals and core values focus on the social emotional wellbeing of students, as well as their academic and learning needs. Each of the schools utilizes Responsive Classroom, an approach to teaching that focuses on helping students develop their academic, social, and emotional skills in a learning environment where students can do their best learning. Whole-school celebrations and assemblies, concerts, performances, and exhibitions help to foster a sense of community. Movement breaks are woven into the day for many students to improve attention and engagement.

Each elementary school in the Acton-Boxborough district has one full time counselor and one full time school psychologist. This provides a ratio of 450:1 for counseling support plus testing and psychological support for students with IEPs. In a new consolidated school, there would be a total of two counselors and two psychologists to maintain the ratios consistent with the rest of the district. Each counselor and psychologist would need an office that would provide welcoming space for one-on-one or small group support for 6-8 students. Counselors and psychologists run lunch bunch groups, social pragmatics groups, and other social and emotional support groups.

The ABRSD recognizes that children grow and develop at different rates and in different ways. To a greater or lesser extent, children may require assistance and support in adjusting to particular stages of personal, social or cognitive development. Within each school, the school counselor works cooperatively with parents, teachers, administrators and other specialists to ensure a successful school experience for students. ABRSD works to support each student to develop a positive sense of self, the skills to interact productively, and the maturity to make wise decisions. Through this cooperative effort, students will be able to utilize their potential in constructive, responsible and satisfying ways.

Direct support to children in the school setting may involve individual and/or group counseling on a weekly, short-term or crisis intervention basis. School counseling encourages age-appropriate social development, helps children develop academic confidence, and promotes understanding of personal/emotional issues. Counselors regularly consult with parents, teachers, specialists and administrators to assess a student's needs and to plan an appropriate course of action. Each counselor consults regularly with staff in the building to coordinate services provided to students. It is important for the school counselor to be co-located with the building administration, the school psychologist, and other related service providers in order to maximize collaboration and communication. The current buildings do not facilitate this due to layout and space constraints.

The District believes that school climate and culture have an effect on the success of social and emotional as well as academic learning. There is a desire to make large schools feel smaller and more connected while focusing on social emotional learning (SEL), positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), community building, student wellness, and engagement. To achieve this, staff and students are organized into smaller learning communities or pods. Nursing and counseling services are central to supporting the overall health and well-being of students.

Understanding the social-emotional needs of students at specific developmental levels is an important factor in providing quality instruction. Ensuring the building is designed to take this into account and have spaces specifically dedicated to movement and mindfulness activities, will help us foster prosocial behaviors. Attention to the use of space, natural light, color, movement break spaces, whole school gathering spaces, and placement of student work displays will all help to create a student-centered and inclusive atmosphere.

Learners need a variety of seating options, including stools, standing desks, and soft seating, all of which should be easily movable from one location to another within a learning space. Increased visibility and natural lighting across learning spaces will make differentiating learning easier and students healthier.

Spaces within or between classroom pods/groupings that accommodate an entire grade level (75-100 students) are necessary to encourage regular movement breaks, whole-group presentations, grade-level meetings, and other collaborative learning experiences. Well-designed, age-appropriate outdoor learning spaces will also contribute to improved social emotional and academic learning.

Given increased numbers of economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with family mental health issues, the district has begun to provide wraparound family services. The district would like to allow for one additional, shared office space in the counseling area for wraparound services.

## **Library/Media Center**

**Vision:** The Acton-Boxborough Elementary Library Media Centers are learning commons that are the “hub” of the schools where students are engaged in collaboration, creativity, critical inquiry, adaptability, and trans-literacy.

**Mission:** The mission of the Acton Boxborough Elementary School Library Media Program is to empower students to become enthusiastic readers, information seekers, and creative problem-solvers, prepared to participate in an evolving world.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District uses the new Digital Literacy/Computer Science Frameworks and current research into the evolving role of 21st-century school libraries in Elementary School Library/Media centers. Libraries are being reinvented as information becomes more readily

accessible online. The role of libraries is more about connecting learners and constructing knowledge. As a result, libraries must provide a welcoming common space with ready access to digital devices and flexible seating so that students can explore, research, communicate, and collaborate

Our students will live and work in a global environment that will differ markedly from their world today. The continuing evolution of our society will transform both their personal and professional lives. Increasing globalization will alter their world perspectives and converging technologies will change the way they create, consume, learn, and interact with others. They will need to be innovative, flexible thinkers who are able to transfer learned knowledge to ever-changing environments. Through unit and lesson instruction, collaborative curriculum integration, and classroom support library-media specialists cultivate curious, independent learners and develop the skills needed to be ethically responsible and successful in our global community. They connect learners to diverse materials and learning opportunities in an environment that supports cooperation, collaboration, and a love of reading. No other educator receives as much training in selection, evaluation, and integration of educational resources. A certified school librarian or library/media specialist can evaluate online databases for potential licensing, investigate open educational resources, locate resources in languages other than English, and seek out texts, sites and web tools for specific assignments and help educators integrate such resources into their instruction.

Library-Media Specialists teach students to develop skills and engage in the information literacy process, evaluate and select the appropriate technology tool for the task, understand, practice and demonstrate appropriate, safe and ethical uses of information and technology, and read widely and fluently for pleasure, personal growth, and to make connections to the world. Access to library instruction and help ensures that a hybrid and electronic library collection is well used to promote 21st century teaching and learning.

The Acton-Boxborough Library-Media Centers are places that encourages exploratory learning, critical digital literacy, and media literacy skills, and curates a collection of materials that reflect a diverse society and student populations. The media center space and programs:

- Effectively engage students in learning the Digital Literacy and Computer Science (DLCS) standards.
- Support AASL/MSLA frameworks which include information/media literacy.
- Incorporate breakout spaces for collaborative and project-based learning

## **Visual and Performing Arts**

### **Visual Arts**

The new school will have 9 PreK classrooms, 6 Kindergarten classrooms, and 36 grade 1-6 classrooms. PreK and Kindergarten are scheduled for 30 minutes per week of Visual Arts. Grades 1-6 are scheduled for 45 minutes per week for Visual Arts. These instructional blocks also provide classroom teachers with

contractual preparation time. There are 12 additional art classes per week that are scheduled as a second art rotation, which provides grade levels with collaborative planning time. A total of 64 art classes will need to be scheduled across the three Visual Arts classrooms.

Ceramics is part of the Visual Arts curriculum across all ABRSD schools. Four of the current elementary schools have a kiln. Gates and Douglas are the only schools that do not have a kiln. Kilns are safely installed to provide a safe working environment, and all Visual Art teachers are extensively trained in the safe use of these materials.

At the elementary school level, students develop their own creative visions through a wide variety of projects in two and three dimensional media, including drawing and painting, sculpture, ceramics, fabric, woodworking, architecture, digital art and interdisciplinary projects that connect to STEAM, humanities and performing arts curricula. While learning discrete skills in specific media and elements of art are valued, great emphasis is put on developing habits of mind that foster lifelong learning. These include creative problem solving, close observation, collaboration, and learning through play.

To meet this vision the visual arts classroom must be seen as a flexible learning space that can be easily reconfigured for a variety of instructional formats and media. The layout should include:

- A large open area with a rug for whole class gatherings.
- There should also be room for at least six large tables with stools to accommodate group and individual work.
- Equipment should include a whiteboard, ceiling-mounted projector, document camera, projection screen, bulletin boards, drying racks, and daily access to laptops and tablets.
- Sufficient storage space is also essential for organizing art supplies and student work.
- If a STEAM lab is not available elsewhere in the school, each table should also be equipped with detachable vices and electrical outlets.

In addition, if the visual and performing arts are to be infused across the curriculum in support of authentic project-based learning, it is essential that the school includes a dedicated, flexible space (separate from the cafeteria or gym) that could be used as:

- A gallery for the visual arts.
- An intimate performance space for music and theater.
- An exhibition space for all manner of student presentations.

Finally, the school's indoor and outdoor common areas should include ample room for displaying two and three-dimensional student work.

### **Performing Arts (Music and Theater)**

Music classes are offered to all students at least once a week and during traditional performing ensembles (chorus/band/orchestra). All students in grades K-6 participate in weekly general music classes. The K-6 general music curriculum provides opportunities for students to learn and practice: singing alone and in large ensembles; performing on instruments (Classroom instruments, keyboards,

guitars, various percussion, and recorder) alone and in groups of various sizes; physical movement in response to music along with dramatic performance; reading and writing traditional and iconic music notation; analysis/evaluation of audio and visual performances – both live and on video/audio; and composition/creating music.

Additionally, all students in grades 5 and 6 participate in ensembles including band, orchestra or chorus. Instruction in these ensembles includes large group instruction that is scheduled concurrently, as well as small group instrumental lessons.

The new school will have 9 PreK classrooms, 6 Kindergarten classrooms, and 36 grade 1-6 classrooms. PreK and Kindergarten are scheduled for 30 minutes per week of Music. Grades 1-6 are scheduled for 45 minutes per week for Music. These instructional blocks also provide classroom teachers with contractual preparation time. There are 12 additional Music classes per week that are scheduled as a second Music rotation, which provides grade levels with collaborative planning time. A total of 64 Music classes will need to be scheduled across the three Music classrooms, along with the grades 5 and 6 large ensemble groups.

The music program supports the need for the music spaces specifically designed for music instruction with:

- A large, open, flexible, and carpeted space with taller than average ceiling heights and ample acoustic treatment are ideal for multi-purpose activities including:
  - classroom activities
  - applied music techniques
  - choral music
  - parent/community performances
  - instrumental music instruction.
- Appropriate acoustical features would significantly improve student safety (hearing) and curriculum delivery
- Adequate performance spaces for ensembles to rehearsals and present formal and casual concerts
- Space designated for small group instrumental instruction for band and orchestra students

## Physical Education and Health

ABRSD has a commitment to wellness, as exemplified in the district's core values. Wellness instruction comprises the areas of health, physical education, and general personal wellness. During physical education classes, students engage in a range of activities designed to develop physical abilities and increase fitness. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is currently reviewing the health curriculum, so as of yet, the District has not made any changes to the elementary curriculum. Current health standards are shared among classroom teachers, nurses, counselors and PE teachers. For

example, the nurse will work with teachers to design joint activities around such things as nutrition, heart health and tick precaution/safety.

Physical education classes are presently offered to all students K-6. Grades 1-6 meet for 45 minutes and kindergarten meets for 30-45 minutes depending on half or full day. Inclusion of the PK in the new building will allow us the opportunity for PK to be part of the rotation. PE classes take place in the gymnasium or on the fields/black top surrounding the schools.

The new school will have 9 PreK classrooms, 6 Kindergarten classrooms, and 36 grade 1-6 classrooms. PreK and Kindergarten are scheduled for 30 minutes per week of Physical Education. Grades 1-6 are scheduled for 45 minutes per week for Physical Education. These instructional blocks also provide classroom teachers with contractual preparation time. There are 12 additional Physical Education classes per week that are scheduled as a second art rotation, which provides grade levels with collaborative planning time. A total of 64 art classes will need to be scheduled across the three Visual Arts classrooms.

One large gym which with a divider down the middle will provide the opportunity for two Physical Education classes to be scheduled concurrently for the 36 grade 1-6 classrooms each week, plus 10 of the weekly rotation classes. A smaller gym, appropriate for younger children, would provide space for PreK and K to be scheduled weekly.

A sampling of outdoor spaces adjacent to the schools include smaller playground structures for the primary grades (PreK-2), medium sized playground structures for upper grades (3-6), blacktop with painted play lines, full-sized basketball courts, a baseball diamond, and soccer size field space. Currently, there are outdoor nature play spaces at each school that were funded through the District's operating budget and a grant from the Acton Community Preservation Committee (CPC). These spaces would need to be replicated in the new outdoor space of the new school. Students use the fields, swings, blacktop area, playgrounds, and outdoor nature play spaces during recess. Additionally, students like to relax in the shade and observe the natural environment.

It is important that the gymnasium provides the requisite space for the safety of students and spectators. Specific design features that consider the following activities would align with the district's core value of wellness.

- Project Adventure
- Adjustable basketball backboards
- Wall mounted or floor sleeve volleyball standards
- Outdoor fitness circuit/stations
- A room designated just for yoga/relaxation that is soundproof,
- A gymnasium space that can accommodate younger students in K-2 in a developmentally appropriate manner

Since the gymnasium is used for events after the school day and on weekends, the building design should incorporate security measures that carefully control how the gymnasium, as well as restrooms, are accessed outside of school hours.

The school properties being considered for this project are located in neighborhoods and they have beautiful natural settings. It will be important to preserve the natural landscape as much as possible. This will minimize the impact on the neighbors and improve outdoor learning opportunities and nature walks. The District envisions that many of the existing outdoor spaces will be replicated in the new building project. Enhancements would include:

- covered picnic tables and sheltered areas that would accommodate a class or a grade level
- paved walkways around the perimeter of the schools to be used by students and staff who participate in walking and running clubs before or after school
- an artificial turf field as part of the play and P.E. space.

If the school is built on the Gates property, it will be important to replace the softball field that is currently located at Gates. This field is an important part of the district's athletic program. If it is built at Douglas or Conant, town and school athletic fields will need to be replicated.

## English Language Education (ELE) Program

The ELE program's goal is to develop both social and more complex academic language skills that enable students to perform independently at grade level. Students' needs are met with a combination of in-class support and pull-out, small group sessions. The elementary certified teachers support English learners (ELs) to develop proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking within the context of the general education curriculum. ELE teachers communicate regularly with classroom teachers to review upcoming curriculum themes and content objectives in order to provide students with structured language development work in the context of those themes. ABRSD's ELE program provides services to students whose first languages include dozens of world languages.

DESE considers ABRSD to be a "mid-incident district" for English learners. There is currently one fulltime ELE teacher at Douglas and two full time teachers at both Gates and Conant. Most of the district's elementary teachers have received the SEI endorsement. We may need to add another teacher or two for these schools. Enrollment in the ELE program has remained relatively stable over the last few years, as shown below for each school year (based on October 1st count):

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
202	229	240	267	233

Currently, the ELE teachers at Conant and Gates share a full-sized classroom, divided between

them. This has worked out well to share materials and resources. At Douglas, the ELE teacher shares a divided space with the learning center teacher. The three ELE teachers that will serve the students in the new consolidated Gates/Douglas could share one classroom with small group instructional spaces within the classroom. This will allow for collaboration and shared materials.

As with other areas of the building:

- It will be critical to ensure there are enough flexible spaces for small group instruction
- Furniture should be flexible and facilitate collaborative learning, creativity, problem solving and communication, as well as to leverage technology.
- There should be plenty of wall space to accommodate word walls, charts, word cues, photographs, and other visual displays that support language acquisition and learning.
- The learning space should also have a small, sub-separate area that is visible through windows, where students can access a listening and speaking center to practice their skills in these two critical areas.

## **Nursing Services**

Currently, there is a full time nurse assigned to each elementary school in the district, two at the Jr. High School and three at the high school. The district maintains a ratio of one nurse for every 500 students. The mission of the ABRSD school nurses is to promote the safety and wellness of more than 5700 students and more than 800 staff during the school day in order to optimize learning. Typically, the school nurses care for an average total of 300 students each school day. The nurses collaborate with a host of people, including families, the school physician, and outside physicians to support students who are injured or who have chronic medical conditions. Per state law, they administer vision, hearing, posture, and BMI screenings to students and review physical exam results and immunizations as required by state law across the elementary grades. As more and more students are contending with diabetes, life threatening allergies, and many other illness, areas within the health office for privacy have become more important. We believe that a shared health office can provide the nurses from each school with another professional with whom to review medical concerns and it will provide an opportunity for each nurse to leave for lunch while keeping the health office open and available for students.

With Gates and Douglas consolidated into a single school, there would be two nurses on staff to serve the 1,000 elementary school students along with the 130 PreK students. The health office/nursing suite should be centrally-located and shared between both buildings, as well as the early childhood program. The health office would ideally have two entrances, but with nurse work areas, semi-private spaces for students who are ill, clinic space, and storage. Given the number of students in the school, there should be two bathrooms located within the nursing suite.



## Special Education Programs

Special Education services address the individual and diverse learning, social, and emotional needs of students who require specialized instruction, and/or related services in order to access the general education curriculum. ABRSD special educators work collaboratively with general educators to provide a range of evidence-based specialized instruction to meet the needs of a wide range of students. In recent years, the District has worked to identify and eliminate gaps in the special education continuum.

In February 2017, DESE conducted an on-site Coordinated Program Review. ABRSD's Special Education programs meet or exceed all rubric elements and regulations as reviewed and corrected through the DESE Coordinated Review process.

Currently, 15.6% of students in ABRSD have an Individual Education Plan. Balancing inclusion supports with specially designed pull-out instruction ensures that all students receive appropriate individualized instruction. Special education services range from the least restrictive (for example, in-class support services) to more restrictive (significant amount of multiple services out of the regular education classroom). Elementary students across the district are supported through a variety of teaching models such as whole group instruction, flexible grouping, small group instruction, and individualized instruction.

Programming includes specialized programs, learning centers, and inclusion/push-in integrated programs which address student needs for social-emotional support and academic support. Students receive a range of services from accommodations in general education classes to more supported programming in substantially separate, co-taught and learning center models. Expertise in the special education department is provided by a range of specialists, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, board certified behavior analysts, and a team chairperson.

Special Education faculty and related service staff are typically assigned smaller instructional spaces. Currently, some staff members share space or are in spaces that are too small and not conducive to providing high-quality instruction that is consistent with the District's vision. Because many of the existing special education learning spaces are too small to accommodate the needs of the students, staff often need to relocate small group instruction to various areas across the buildings. Additionally, students who use wheelchairs cannot attend Gates or Douglas, as they are not accessible.

### **CASE Collaborative**

As a collaborative member of Concord Area Special Education Collaborative (CASE), the District considers CASE an integral part of the ABRSD school community. Prior to the 2018-19 school year, the district housed nine CASE classrooms: two at Blanchard Memorial School, two at McCarthy-Towne Elementary, and five for CASE Colebrook High School in the Administration Building.

As the district has gotten more and more crowded, we have had to work with CASE to move all but one of these programs to other facilities. Due to space constraints and enrollment numbers, the District is now only able to allocate one classroom and some small adjoining office/support spaces to CASE at Blanchard Elementary. ABRSD is the largest district in the CASE collaborative, and limiting CASE programming at ABRSD to one classroom has been very difficult for the collaborative. It is important to ensure the CASE Collaborative program will have classroom and support spaces in the new building, and District administrators are collaborating with CASE leaders to identify specific needs.

### **Conant Elementary**

At 14.3%, the percentage of students with disabilities at Conant is lower than the District's. Conant houses resource and learning center programs. The *Connections* resource program is comprised of two programs that support students identified with a disability that impacts social functioning and communication, such as autism spectrum disorder or a social/communication disability. Often, these are children who transition from the early childhood program. Conant is also home to three learning centers that provide services to students with a variety of disabilities. These students participate fully in general education with accommodations and specially designed instruction to address individual needs. There are no anticipated programming changes. Conant special education staff currently includes one IEP team chairperson, five special educators, 15 teaching assistants, one school psychologist, two FTE speech/language pathologists, and part-time BCBA, occupational therapist and physical therapist.

### **Douglas Elementary**

At 15.5%, the percentage of students with disabilities at Douglas is aligned with the District's. Douglas is home to two learning centers that provide services to students who have a variety of disabilities. These students participate fully in general education with accommodations and specially designed instruction to address individual needs. Douglas is also home to the Nurturing Educational Support Team (NEST), which provides support for students with a broad range of academic and social needs. This specialized program offers students a small group setting for direct instruction in math and language arts, executive functioning, and social-emotional skills. The district plans to expand this program into a language-based learning program in the future, so would need additional space to do so. Douglas special education staff currently includes one IEP team chairperson, three special education teachers, seven teaching assistants, one school psychologist, two speech/language pathologists, and part-time BCBA, occupational therapist and physical therapist.

### **Gates Elementary**

Gates Elementary, with 15.4% students with IEPs, houses one K-3 resource program that provides intensive supports and specially designed instruction for students who require additional supports within the general education classroom and/or accommodations or modifications to the curriculum. The resource program emphasizes the development of self-advocacy skills, greater independence, and responsibility for learning. Gates is also home to three learning centers that provide services to students with a variety of disabilities. Students who receive learning center support participate fully in general education with accommodations and specially designed instruction to address individual needs. In the future, the district plans to expand the resource program to include grades 4-6, so would need

additional space to do so. Gates special education staff currently includes one IEP team chairperson, four special education teachers, eight special education assistants, one school psychologist, two speech language pathologists, and part-time BCBA, occupational therapist and physical therapists.

### **Special Education Program: Future Design Needs**

Special education learning spaces are situated alongside general education classrooms, allowing staff to communicate and collaborate throughout the day. The building design will need to include more appropriate special education spaces that are located throughout the building. Some students require small group instruction, so breakout spaces connected to the associated special education programs are needed to provide these services while minimizing travel time and disruption to the day. The building also needs several small calming/sensory spaces and should also include several small observation spaces with two-way mirrors so parents and staff can observe students for evaluation purposes.

The design of special education learning spaces should be sensory-friendly with care given to views, sightlines, sounds, and smells. These sensory inputs can be under- or overstimulating for many students. Ideally the hallways in the preschool and kindergarten learning areas should be designed to discourage running and eloping. The mechanical system should be designed to minimize visual distraction, excessive forced air, and ambient noise. The lighting of these spaces should include full-spectrum lighting with dimmable controls. To minimize visual clutter, the color and layout of the room should minimize hues and elements that can be overwhelming. The adjacencies to other programmatic spaces will be important for accessibility for this population and to ensure optimal acoustic performance.

The special education department also includes a number of specialists and staff in supervisory roles, requiring a special education department suite. The department suite would house offices for the IEP team chairperson, school psychologist, speech language pathologists, counselor, and other related service providers. For related services staff like the occupational and physical therapists who are not in the building every day, the department suite should contain a few offices that serve as “remote campsites.” These would be shared desk spaces for itinerant service providers to set up a workspace on the days they are in the building. The department suite also needs to include two or three spaces for IEP and special education building team meetings that can support up to 15 adults at one time.

### **CASE Collaborative**

The District plans to support CASE in housing two elementary-level programs for students who are medically fragile. The space needs for this sort of program include two large classrooms on the first floor of the building, each of which could support up to eight students and wheelchairs/equipment. Housed in between the two classrooms would be adjoining spaces that include a non-locking time away/calming space with windows, a large office/therapy space for related service providers, a nursing office, a bathroom large enough for a changing table/lift, and a small meeting room for IEP

and staff meetings. These spaces should be located in close proximity to an area where students can easily access CASE vans with lifts, preferably with an exterior exit door to accommodate arrival and dismissal. ABRSD will continue to collaborate closely with CASE leaders and staff to identify more specific needs during upcoming design phases.

## Early Childhood Program

The Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program (CHECP), operated by the Student Services Department, is an integrated early childhood learning environment for children ages 3-5 years old. CHECP provides an inclusive preschool for children with and without disabilities to learn and grow at their own pace. Children with identified special education needs and students who do not have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are educated side-by-side, meeting required IDEA regulations pertaining to inclusion in the least restrictive environment. The curriculum is developmentally based, child-directed and aligned with the Massachusetts Early Childhood Learning Standards and Curriculum Guidelines/ Frameworks.

### *Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program Philosophy:*

- All children can be successful.
- All children can learn and develop.
- All children learn and develop at their own pace given their unique learning styles.
- All children learn through active exploration of their environments.
- All children learn through interaction with peers and adults.
- All children need a nurturing, predictable environment in which to grow and learn.
- Play is the foundation of a child's learning and development.
- All children learn best in an inclusive, child-centered, developmentally appropriate environment.
- The role of adults is to support and facilitate each child's learning.

CHECP currently has eight classrooms across two sites as well as parent drive-in/drop-in itinerant services (occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, physical therapy) for students requiring those special education related services. Half-day and full-day integrated services are provided across the program, meeting four days per week. Most students spend a portion of each day participating in an integrated preschool class in order to foster social growth. By the end of June 2018, The Early Childhood Program was serving 139 students in a variety of services, including 76 students receiving special education services as outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

State requirements for integrated settings require that class makeup not exceed 50% students with IEPs, with a maximum of seven children with IEPs per class. While overall enrollment for children with IEPs has remained fairly stable, the number of children requiring specialized instruction in applied behavioral analysis increased by 35% last year (23 in June 2018 vs. 17 in June 2017). Below are the historical enrollment numbers as reported on June 30th for the last five years.

	June 2015	June 2016	June 2017	June 2018
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	138	147	143	139
<b>Children with IEPs</b>	76	76	72	76

On October 1, the CHECP had 105 PreK students enrolled. As of January 1, the CHECP had 115 students enrolled. We are estimating 130 students for the future CHECP in the new consolidated school. We originally requested 10 classrooms, but we have reduced it to 9 classrooms. The current 115 students are distributed across 9 classrooms as follows:

	All-Day PreK	Half-Day AM Prek	Half Day PM Prek	
Classroom 1	14 Students			
Classroom 2	11 Students			
Classroom 3		11 Students	12 Students	
Classroom 4		12 Students	13 Students	
Classroom 5	5 Students			
Classroom 6	Students from the All Day Autism program spend part of their day in an integrated classroom and part of their day in this classroom.			
Classroom 7	14 Students			
Classroom 8		12 Students	11 Students	
Classroom 9				

46 of the 115 students are students with IEPs. State requirements for integrated settings require that class makeup not exceed 50% students with IEPs, with a maximum of seven children with IEPs per class. When students turn 3, if they are eligible for preschool services through an IEP, they enter the preschool in the middle of the year, on their third birthday. As a result, the number of students with IEPs in classrooms grows throughout the year.

CHECP program uses an integrated therapy model whenever possible. The specialists (occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, school psychologist, English language educator) collaborate constantly across the school day to discuss children's needs and learning objectives across all learning areas. Some therapy occurs in the classroom setting, while other therapy occurs in separate therapy rooms, depending on the individual needs of each child.

Across both PreK sites, ABRSD currently employs eight special educators (one who is also certified as a BCBA), five speech-language pathologists (SLP), three occupational therapists, one physical therapist, one school psychologist, approximately 25 special education assistants or ABA trainers, an Early Childhood Coordinator, and a part-time administrative assistant who provide direct services and/or

support services to students, as well as perform evaluations.

### **Acton CHECP Site**

Six of the eight preschool classrooms are currently housed in a former elementary school, now the district Administration Building, in Acton, which was built in 1957. The District Capital Improvement Plan and Master Planning completed in 2016-17 determined that the preschool in the Administration Building was in significant need of relocation. The current Acton CHECP space was not designed for this age group or program and has been extensively retrofitted to attempt to meet the needs of preschool-aged children. The building is shared with the district's administrative offices and community education program. There are no art, music, physical education teachers or a nurse, and no opportunity for students or staff to collaborate with students and staff in other grades.

The program also has two classrooms that provide specialized instruction for students who require individual and small group support using the principles and teaching methodology in applied behavioral analysis (ABA). Given this format and the students' needs, direct instruction generally occurs 1:1 or 2:1. Children in the preschool ABA programs require small group instruction and/or discrete trials, and need connected breakout space to provide these services while minimizing travel time and disruption to their day. The ABA trainers and staff collect an inordinate amount of data. Currently, this data is collected manually and stored in thick binders that staff then aggregate to inform instruction and IEP goals and objectives. This could be accomplished more effectively and efficiently utilizing technology.

Preschool bathrooms and several rooms in the Administration Building where students receive speech-language and motor therapy are not accessible for students with physical disabilities. To access some of these rooms, staff and children need to walk through other therapy spaces or a custodial storage room. Currently, there are no smaller spaces to meet student calming, break or sensory needs, or to provide one-to-one instruction or assessment, so staff is forced to deliver these types of supports in the hallway. Nursing is not available in the Administration Building, and children must walk to the building next door if they need health services.

### **Boxborough CHECP Site**

The other two preschool classrooms are housed at Blanchard Memorial School in Boxborough. The playground at Blanchard Memorial School is not accessible for students with physical disabilities. While related services staff (OT, PT, SLP) have office spaces in both buildings, they are not located in close proximity to the classrooms. When services cannot be provided in the classroom, staff spend a lot of time bringing children from one location to the other. The classrooms at Blanchard do have a nurse on-site.

### **Early Childhood Program: Future Design Needs**

ABRSD envisions an early childhood entrance that is welcoming, bright and cheerful both outside and inside and includes an office for the early childhood coordinator and administrative assistant. A

separate driveway for special education transportation and a parent motor vehicle drop-off area are needed to ensure student safety. There should also be dedicated family parking near the preschool-related services staff (OT, PT, SLP) offices so that families accessing drive-in services do not have to walk from another building as they do currently.

Eight or nine classroom spaces are needed. These spaces should have lots of natural light and be partially carpeted to facilitate morning meeting time and partially tiled to support messy preschool projects. There should be sufficient space in each classroom for various dramatic play areas, work and exploration, and a sensory/calming area for children to access as needed. There should be a vestibule of sorts in the entryway of each classroom to keep backpacks, boots, jackets, and more separate from instructional spaces and out of the hallway or pod area. Classroom furniture should be a combination of hard and soft seating and workspaces that are both flexible and movable. Within or between every two preschool classroom, there should be a combined storage area and bathroom, with one sink and a large storage area for instructional materials and items for dramatic play centers, which rotate every few weeks. Classrooms should have at least one sink inside each classroom.

Each preschool classroom should have access to enough iPads for each child, whether through shared iPad carts or iPad stations in each room. There should be additional iPad charging stations available for adult iPads, to facilitate the data collection required for each children with IEPs, and especially for the ABA program. Additional assistive technology should be available for students in the classroom.

A small teaching space adjacent to each classroom is needed for one-on-one instruction and assessment. These should be close to the preschool classrooms and ideally co-located near the related services staff (SLP, OT, PT, psychologist) supporting K-6. The preschool also needs multiple, small breakout spaces for consultation meetings, staff collaboration, and ABA clinics and IEP meetings with families. The preschool classrooms should also be located near the nurses' offices for the elementary schools.

The CHECP should have separate office spaces for the coordinator/administrative assistant, school psychologist, shared office spaces for the speech-language pathologists, and a shared motor space for the occupational and physical therapists. The motor space should be appropriately-sized to provide therapy for students using a variety of gross motor equipment, including suspended equipment (e.g. adaptive swing for sensory needs) and lots of large storage for big pieces of equipment. The therapy rooms should be in close proximity or connected to classrooms to minimize travel time and optimize staff collaboration. Classrooms and speech/language therapy rooms should be acoustically sound for students with hearing loss. Because of the number of observations and evaluations conducted by the program, there is also a need for a small group testing and observation area with two-way glass. Spaces should be flexible so that they can adapt to changes in educational programming and curriculum needs.

CHECP needs an early childhood playground that is created using universal design for learning, that is not only accessible but also inclusive. This space should have plenty of shade and offer a variety of

activities, including crawling, riding bikes and playing on various apparatus. It is important to be accessible to young children of all abilities. This could be shared outdoor play space with lower grades, as well as a smaller gym space that would lend itself to age-appropriate instruction. It is important that this space be enclosed/secure to ensure safety for students who elope, and it should not be located in the middle of a parking circle as it is now.

Hallways/space outside classrooms should be designed to be used for both learning and play. Apparatus capable of being stored to the side of hallways and materials/equipment that hang out of reach off of wall hooks would allow for areas to be used for multiple purposes. A small alcove in the entryway of each classroom is needed to support students transitioning in and out of the classroom with their outdoor clothing/boots, backpacks, etc. Items that can be easily removed could turn interior spaces into play areas in inclement weather. Finally, children enrolled in CHECP should have access to specials like music, art, and gym a few times per week, with a focus on play.

## **Teacher Planning and Professional Learning**

Research is clear that collaborative time among educators improves student learning outcomes. Grade level collaborative teams have shared preparation time four days per week as well as Thursday afternoons when students have early release days. Presently, there is insufficient teacher planning space, and teachers generally meet within their individual classrooms as space allows.

The district's professional learning program is designed to provide appropriate growth opportunities for all educators at all stages of their careers. Elementary educators meet by grade-level and in individual, self-selected workshops, all in an effort to improve teaching and learning. A future facility should include conference-style educator meeting space to reflect the increasingly collaborative nature of curriculum delivery by grade-level teams. Any spaces like this should be located by grade-level classrooms and be distinct from a staff lunchroom, which will be utilized solely for breaks and socialization.

Faculty meetings and all-staff professional learning offerings are currently held in the building library, in classrooms, or in the cafeteria, which are not comfortable, are often crowded, and lack heating/cooling. Currently, there is not adequate lighting or technology available for presentations.

## **Teacher Planning and Professional Learning: Future Design Needs**

The provision for flexible and collaborative meeting space would allow staff to maximize planning and professional learning opportunities. Smaller collaborative spaces for grade level teams to utilize, combined with larger open areas for whole-faculty professional learning are needed to support educators in ongoing professional learning.



## Lunch Program

Lunch is prepared and served in each of the school kitchens. Lunch is served in three 30 minute seatings. With 1,000 students in the new school, there would be 330 students at each lunch seating. As mentioned above, the district has been operating in a twin elementary school (The Parker Damon Building) for the last fifteen years. The Parker Damon Building has a shared kitchen, which allows sharing food and staff between the two schools. Meals are prepared on site. The Parker Damon building has a single large cafeteria space which is located in the center of the building, right next to the main office for the McCarthy-Towne elementary school, and near several classrooms. Each lunch period has about 350 students in one open space. Large groups of students are transitioning in and out of the cafeteria during a large portion of the school day, disrupting instruction in the neighboring classrooms and office. The district's experience with the Parker Damon Building has led us to recommend one shared kitchen but two separate smaller cafeterias connected to the shared kitchen. This would help with the overall noise levels and activity that has proven to be overwhelming for many students at the Parker Damon School, while gaining the efficiencies of a shared cafeteria staff, kitchen space and equipment.

The district values the ability to provide healthy, locally sourced food. Whenever possible, the district incorporates local food, currently utilizing vegetables from the junior high school garden as available. Junior high students also prepare food as part of classroom projects, and they plant and maintain the vegetable garden in raised beds in the school courtyard. The district would like to have a similar program involving students growing a garden on the new school grounds.

Our elementary school cafeterias are also used as learning spaces when lunch is not scheduled. Grade levels and whole school meetings are scheduled at Gates and Douglas. Students often perform for their classmates, share their work, present and/or perform for classmates or parents. Gates and Douglas each offer Band, Chorus, and String Ensemble opportunities to all 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. These groups meet weekly, and there are not enough music classrooms for each group to meet. Two smaller cafeterias (instead of one larger cafeteria), each with its own stage, will provide space for these performing groups to be scheduled for rehearsals and performances.

Efficiencies can be gained by having one kitchen for both elementary schools. The kitchen can have a combined staff with one cafeteria manager. However, it is very important that the cafeteria space be divided into smaller, welcoming spaces with careful attention paid to noise and access to the space. If possible, the kitchen should be in the middle of the separate cafeteria. Students often go from recess to lunch, so transitions need to be considered. Seating space in the cafeterias should be varied to meet the needs of all students. A place should be designed for All Day Kindergarten and Full Day Preschool students to eat lunch in a small and inviting environment. Each school should have its own cafeteria with multiple entrances to reduce the noise and transition traffic into and out of the cafeteria. Each cafeteria should have a stage and enough space for all school meetings. Douglas, and Gates, each have all school meetings regularly, with performances on stage and student

presentations. These are important components of each individual school community. In lieu of an Auditorium, a properly sized “Cafetorium” can serve as lunch space as well as a space for all school community activities.

## Transportation

ABRSD provides transportation to all students. As a regional district that applies for and receives a percentage of transportation expenses reimbursed annually from the Commonwealth, ABRSD is mandated to transport all individuals regardless of home distance from school and cannot charge a fee for this service. The ABRSD Elementary model of open enrollment and school choice for all presents unique challenges for the transportation system as a whole. The need to transport all students from any geographic location while keeping ride times reasonable creates the need for a very large system with many buses operating concurrently. As a result, the need to provide solutions to provide safe and efficient dropoff and pickup of students with pedestrian, school bus, and general traffic flow is heightened. The district’s experience with a large 1,000 student twin elementary school building has provided experience with ways in which bus, car, and pedestrian traffic can be more safe and efficient.

## Transportation and Building Access: Future Design Needs

It is important that a building with 1,000 elementary students and 130 preschool students have several separate ways to enter and exit the building, and that bus traffic can be separate from cars and pedestrians. The building would need the following:

- A bus loop that would be able to stack 15 to 20 busses. The access road in and out of the property for the busses should be separate from the road in and out for cars.
- There should be a large central entrance and exit for large numbers of students. However, each school should also have an entrance that is separate so that during the school day visitors to one of the schools will go through the entrance designated for that school. This will provide more security because the main office for each separate school would be responsible for granting access to parents and visitors to that specific school. This will also provide multiple paths to enter and exit the building during the busy morning bus drop-off and afternoon dismissal.
- The Early Childhood Program should have a separate entrance and exit that is designed to provide families with a smaller, warm entrance for the district’s youngest students. The ECP entrance should have comfortable furniture and spaces near the entrance for the many parent meetings and coffees that takes place in this school.
- The ECP should also have separate designated parking and a car drop-off/pickup area. Students in the ECP do not have bus transportation. Rather, their parents drive them and pick them up daily.
- Students with disabilities may arrive at school in a van. Appropriate access for staff to assist children getting on or off of their van is required.
- The elementary schools should have a clear path for parents to drop-off and pick up their

children.

- Pedestrians and cyclists should have safe paths to walk to and from the building.
- There needs to be enough parking for staff. This includes faculty for each school as well as part time and full-time paraprofessional staff.

### Traffic Patterns

Planning safe traffic patterns around the school should be a high priority consideration in the design of the facility. Appropriate traffic control plans should take into account:

- Pedestrian safety accessing the campus
- Providing ample bicycle lanes and “parking”

## Functional and Spatial Relationships

The vision for the school is to provide adaptable, flexible, and varied learning space that celebrates community values, well-being, and student learning. The building should feel physically connected throughout with attention to interior and site circulation. Ample exhibition and curation of student work will be visible throughout the spaces. It will be important to consider the nine-year age span that will exist in a building that houses preschool (age three) through grade six (age twelve) when planning and making decisions around design, flow, light, finishes, and furniture.

The Media Center will serve as the physical and value center of the building benefiting from STEAM learning labs, small group rooms, and isolated quiet spaces within its organization. A key consideration will be the separation of classroom spaces from public-use spaces by the community. This is especially important if multiple schools are located within the same building. Deliberate design thought should be given to ensure shared spaces are equitable, identifiable, and accessible.

Classroom adjacencies will encourage collaboration with flexible learning spaces within and beyond the classroom. Special education spaces will be sprinkled throughout the building, as well as shared extended learning spaces between grade level teams. Classrooms will have the ability to be grouped either by grade level or organizational cohorts depending on room assignments. Specialty classrooms such as art, music, media, STEAM, and teacher collaboration spaces will have deliberate relationships to the core classrooms to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration and equitable access.

## Connection to the Environment

The communities of Acton and Boxborough have long celebrated efforts with regard to environmental sustainability and education and the communities enjoy many natural resources to support these efforts. Additionally, the school district has provided students opportunities that support education around the environment including but not limited to outdoor learning, energy and water management, and composting.

The sites under consideration for the CT Douglas project all provide substantial opportunities for the

project to provide students with a facility that leverages the natural topography of the site in order to celebrate the connection between the school, its students, the community and the environment.

Opportunities for such a connection may include:

- Consideration of school placement within the site to foster students' connection with the environmental features of the site
- Aesthetic design that leverages the unique environmental features of the site and simultaneously honors the specific neighborhood setting of the school
- Strategies which bring environmental features of the site into learning spaces within the school

The district also wishes to create a school that not only provides a high level of energy, water and waste efficiency, but also leverages the inherent design features of the building to create educational opportunities and learning experiences for students. As such, the school design should create opportunities for students to interact with the building in ways which develop a deep understanding of how human behaviors impact the the environmental footprint of the building.

Finally, the schools have made commitments to provide outdoor learning opportunities for students a regular part of their educational experience. As such the design of the school should create a culture of environmental sustainability and site should feature:

- Outdoor learning spaces that provide opportunities for students to learn about the unique environmental features of the site
- Paved access paths to natural areas which can be accessed by all students
- Play areas that integrate naturally into the surroundings
- Covered picnic tables and seating as well as sheltered areas that would accommodate a class or a grade level during outdoor learning activities

## **Security and Visual Access**

ABRSD is committed to ensuring a safe environment for all students and staff; to improve public safety for community members who visit or use school property; and diminish the potential for personal and district loss or destruction of property. The school's current policies and procedures to support building security:

- Clear administrative procedures and policies in place to oversee district safety and security programs.
- Regular and continued vulnerability assessments conducted to observe security in place, identify security deficiencies, determine level of security needed, and make recommendations for improvement.
- Effective management of security using multiple forms of communication; policies and procedures; physical security; training; and response plans involving administration, staff, parents, and students.
- CORI checks for all faculty, staff, volunteers, contractors, and vendors who are on school

property. Staff are required to visibly display identification badges when school is in session.

- Regular fire alarm drills and lockdown drills to ensure faculty and staff can quickly determine if all students are accounted for.
- Ongoing training for staff provided to implement the Emergency Response Plan if needed.
- Educate students, faculty, and staff so they are empowered to report suspicious or concerning behavior.

## Security and Visual Access: Future Design Needs

The future security design of the school should focus on ensuring and providing a welcoming environment for students, families and community members while simultaneously providing a full complement of modern security features which should include, but may not be limited to:

- Safe and secure main entrance and lobby including single entry door per school or program with a door-release button; intercom and video surveillance, and a visitor management system in place. Additional exterior doors should be locked at the start of the school day (others are egress only and monitored).
- Safe access for kitchen, facility, and shipping/receiving separate from school traffic to main entrance.
- Installation of signage to direct visitors, contractors, and vendors to the administration area to be processed for access. Doors and windows should have identification. All occupied rooms have route-of-travel maps on walls.
- The perimeter of the campus is clearly identified from public property. Landscaping supports clear sightlines of the school building exterior.
- Safe and secure vehicular access to the building including the use of bollards, no-parking areas and designated drop-off areas. Separation of vehicular and bus traffic patterns. Safe pathways provided for pedestrians and bicyclists. Emergency and public safety vehicle access is clear.
- Best practices for access control systems in place for building, classroom, and support space access.
- Adequate exterior lighting provided around walkways, doorways, and in parking areas with awareness of minimizing light trespass on neighboring properties and energy efficiency.
- Video surveillance coverage, protocol, and maintenance coordinated with local law enforcement.

## Final Statement

The ABRSD vision and core value statements will drive this building project. When the final design is selected, it will need to support 21st century teaching and learning, wellness, equity, and student engagement. If the building includes two unique elementary schools and an early childhood program, the design will need to balance the individual needs of each school program within the overall facility. Spaces should be designed so that instruction, school and grade configuration can evolve over time to ensure students are prepared to meet the challenges of the future. ABRSD is excited for all the

possibilities that updated facilities can provide for student learning.

Appendix A  
Enrollment of Students Policy and Procedures  
(Including Hometown Guarantee)

Appendix B  
Survey Results  
Public Forums and Feedback  
Regarding Recommended Solution  
December, 2018



## Appendix C

### Survey Results

Narrowing of seven options to two options

12 Community Forums, Video, and Community Survey

June, 2017