



# Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720  
978-264-4700  
[www.abschools.org](http://www.abschools.org)

Peter J. Light  
Superintendent of Schools

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## Superintendent's Update November 1, 2018

### Some Thoughts on Inclusivity

The last week has been a challenging one to watch in the media, as we have seen extensive news coverage both locally and nationally around several incidents of bias as well as extreme and violent acts of hate.

One such incident resulted in the tragic deaths of two African Americans shot after the suspect attempted to first gain access to a locked church. We also watched media coverage unfold as pipe bombs were mailed to various national figures by someone espousing hate-filled messages on social media. We then watched the coverage of the horrific massacre in the Pennsylvania Synagogue, by a man shouting anti-Semitic slurs. At the local level, one of our own elementary students was subject to hateful speech when a man told him that his dog had rights as an American, and that if [the student] didn't like it, "he could go back where he came from."

Hate is not partisan. Hate is Hate. We will not tolerate Hate.

This is an important message for our students to hear and understand. If students confuse political rhetoric and hate, they misunderstand the rich historical political debate that has shaped our nation for generations. As a school district, we have a unique responsibility to make sure students understand this distinction, because as citizens, they will need to engage in civil discourse around important issues with those who may have different beliefs.

It is important to recognize that in the media-rich environment of today's world, and regardless of how we try to insulate our children from these horrific acts, our children are listening. They watch and listen to the media, to their peers, and to our reactions to these incidents. According to a [study published on October 30 by the American Psychological Association](#), the current generation of teens ages 15-21, also known as "Gen Z," are reporting higher levels of stress than previous generations. The study attributes this, based on survey results, to increased gun violence and other recent issues that have received much media attention.

We cannot lose the opportunity to speak out against bias and hate in all of its forms. Our words and actions, or conversely our silence, send incredible messages to those listening.

Our nation was founded on some basic principles of equality laid out in our Declaration of Independence. While far from perfect and ever evolving through interpretation, the core values

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articulated by the founders still apply today: that “all men *and women* are created equal” and “are endowed... with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

All students are our students, and all families are our families. Regardless of the color of your skin, your religion, your gender, gender identity or sexual orientation; independent of your place of birth, your ancestry, economic status or political beliefs; and whether or not you have a disability or any differentiating characteristic, you are one of us, and we are here for you.

I want to take this opportunity to reiterate, on behalf of all of our district leaders, faculty and staff throughout the district that we will not tolerate, accept, condone, or be silent with regard to bias and hate. Our students deserve to be loved and valued as unique individuals and for the families from which they come; and ultimately to feel safe and supported by the school they attend each day. To those members of our community who have been impacted either directly or indirectly by these or other incidents of hate and bias, please know that the AB schools stand with you. We remain committed to fostering an inclusive environment for all members of our community.

Interested in doing more? There is a bystander training sponsored by the Fostering Racial Justice Group available this Sunday, November 4. Information is below:

*Training Active Bystanders*

*Nov. 4, noon – 2 pm*

*UCC Boxborough Community Center, 723 Massachusetts Ave., Boxborough*

*A bystander is a witness – someone who sees a harmful situation and has a choice to make: Do I do something? If so, what? Quabbin Mediation’s program Training Active Bystanders helps participants recognize when they are bystanders, analyze the situation, and develop strategies to safely interrupt harm and generate positive actions. \$10 donation is appreciated but not required. This is sponsored by UCC Boxborough, but the workshop has no religious affiliation (except reflecting spiritual values).*

To register, visit: <https://www.trainingactivebystanders.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=49>

For further information or assistance with registration, contact Cindy Worthington-Berry ([cindyworthingtonberry@gmail.com](mailto:cindyworthingtonberry@gmail.com), 978-263-7387).

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