



## Your Schools

By [Elizabeth S. Leaver](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 24, 2011

### SCHOOLS, VOLUNTEERS IN THE NEWS

## Coalition Targets Teen Safety, Wellness

**With close ties to A-B schools, group promotes positive youth development.**

The Acton-Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth (ABCHY) will offer a variety of upcoming programs and forums that emphasize improving health and safety for some of Acton-Boxborough's most vulnerable citizens—its adolescents.

Since its inception in 2007 through a grant from the Acton-Boxborough United Way, ABCHY has sponsored or supported a variety of programs and initiatives that promote positive youth development. At a recent meeting in the Faulkner Room at Town Hall, coalition members, who represent agencies that include the Acton Board of Health, the Community Alliance for Youth (CAFY), and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District, detailed plans for programs that will target the group's overall goals of improving adolescent mental health and wellness, and preventing substance abuse and youth violence.

As such, the coalition discussed at length an upcoming presentation on bullying and cyber-bullying. Scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 9 at the R. J. Grey library, the program will include a panel discussion on prevention and intervention strategies followed by a question and answer period. Some members expressed interest in also including student speakers, while others agreed to further explore what age group, or groups, would be best served by the forum.

In terms of when issues surrounding bullying are at their most concerning, "It's hard to say where there are clear-cut lines," said Jacquelin Apsler, executive director of Domestic Violence Services Network (DVSN) and ABCHY chair. "But there's no doubt (adolescents from sixth through eighth grade) are particularly at risk, with hormones raging and brains changing."

Other upcoming initiatives discussed by the coalition include:

- a public showing of *Race to Nowhere*, an award-winning documentary about the culture of high pressures and expectations faced by today's students, at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in March.
- therapist-facilitated parent-to-parent conversations on a variety of parenting topics.
- a social norms exploration, a grant-enabled study to "come up with survey questions for parents," said Tina Grosowsky, CAFY representative and coalition member, adding that the questions generated would ultimately be used for focus groups.
- a forum for parents on the rise of drug and alcohol use, "Primarily (to look at) what parents can do to protect their kids and themselves," said Stephen Hitzrot, A-B counseling department chair for grades 7-12. "There are a lot of kids who do not see (drug and alcohol use) as a big deal."

The coalition also discussed an ongoing effort to expand the therapists' directory listing on the ABCHY website. Jan Stewart, the group's outreach coordinator, said a lack of available therapists spurred ABCHY's initial interest in generating the listing, which it did by mailing query letters to therapists in the area. Now fee-based, the directory resource "is growing all the time," said Stewart.

In addition to the forums and programs reviewed, the coalition discussed a Facebook page recently developed for "teens in Acton and Boxborough to be able to promote and post activities," said Stewart. Maintained by ABCHY to ensure appropriate use, the AB Teen Calendar Page is open to all students who "want to let their friends know what's going on," said Stewart.

According to Stewart, some other recent ABCHY achievements include co-sponsoring a forum with the school department on advocating for youth; developing a teen resource card for ABRHS juniors and seniors; holding a parent program, "Loving Your Teen Without Losing Your Mind," with nationally known author and psychologist Dr. Michael J. Bradley; and continuing ongoing outreach efforts with agencies, individuals and organizations that work with youth and families.

ABCHY's next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 17 at Town Hall.



Members of the Acton-Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth (ABCHY) met recently at Town Hall to discuss various efforts for youth empowerment. Credit [Elizabeth S. Leaver](#)