acera

annual report 2022

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A Message from the Director

Dear Acera School Community and Friends,

From our founding, we have sought to be a microcosm of what is possible for all schools. Acera is a lab school; our schooling norms and experiences weave psychology, educational research, and neuroscience principles into practices that best support children's growth and development. We think of these schooling norms, philosophies and curricular frameworks as "tools" which, when put in place in any educational setting, can be transformative to the educational experience, motivation, growth, and wellbeing of children.

In this year's annual report, we outline some subcategories of our "Tools to Transform Schools" – Leadership & Emotional Intelligence, Creativity & Systems Thinking, and Science and Innovation. We include some specific examples of how these capacities become components of our whole educational approach during the 2021/22 school year.

We define the principles that make school effective, like culture. We outline pedagogical approaches, such as layering learning, so that academic skills like mathematical thinking and problem solving are developed concurrently with emotional intelligence skills like collaboration and growth mindset. We share curriculum creation principles, like "teacherpreneurship" to invent and respond to students with interdisciplinary, project-based, authentically relevant, and inquiry-rich experiences.

Instead of focusing on age-limited content coverage standards, we commit to growing core capacities and habits of mind in our students. In order to do this, we must also exhibit these core capacities within our schooling approach itself; system integrity is a secret sauce at Acera.

We are an intentional learning community. We weather and embrace world events to grow and learn together.

Leadership & Emotional Intelligence

Principles of How School Works

- A Culture of Purpose, Inquiry and Agency
- Individual Learning Pathways and Plans
- Teachers as Curriculum Creators
- Student-Driven Passion Projects

Creativity & Systems Thinking

Evidence-Based Learning Design

- Fostering Trust, Creativity and Risk-Taking
- Inquiry and Question-Driven Learning
- Project-Based Learning

Sciences & Innovation

Authentic Learning Experiences Linked to the Real World

- Investigation and Iteration in the Science Lab
- Flexible Thinking in Math...and Beyond
- Practicing Invention and Collaboration within Simulations

Our complex educational approach invites leadership, creativity and initiative from our teachers and students. We all are on point to invent and adapt and reexamine what we do, every day, to constantly improve and be the best learning community we can be. Our school is built around shared values and a common mission to truly understand and do what is right for our students, maximizing their growth journeys as future citizens for our world.

All the best, Courtney Dickinson, Founder & Director

A Culture of Purpose, Inquiry, and Agency

Igniting – and sustaining – a passion for learning

The link between happiness and having a sense of purpose has long been studied, confirmed, and championed. Simply put, people with a sense of purpose live longer, happier, and more productive lives. Acera was founded 12 years ago with purpose at the core of its culture. What does that look like in a school setting?

Habits of mind – like engaging in activities that tap one's intrinsic drive – develop early. Sadly, too often students are asked to comply with task execution without input into what they are doing, or insight into why the work matters. This may unwittingly create habits of unhappiness.

Learning to tap into one's own intrinsic motivation is a capability students practice from their first day at Acera with inquiry-driven projects in topics they choose and around ideas they initiate.

At Acera, students are given opportunities to pursue an interest and nourish their curiosity. This validates their internal drive to engage authentically at school, and creates a runway for them to make contributions that foster their sense of themselves as capable and valuable.

Of course, a culture of "yes" is needed in order for these student-driven projects to manifest. At Acera, school norms are based upon trust in students rather than rules and "no."

All humans respond better when we assume that others are smart, well-intentioned, and capable. School norms which focus on control – corralling kids into lines, shushing them in hallways, posting rules signs with a series of "no's," and consequence-based punishments which include detention and loss of recess – do not actually result in learning new skills or changes in behavior.

The alternative? Invite kids to walk from place to place as they'd like, without lines. If a child is inattentive or agitated in class, give options for movement and different types of seating arrangements and accommodations which enable re-focus on learning. Give students choices each day – a project they chose, an elective they picked, a way to show what they have learned among myriad different types of culminating events. When kids engage authentically in things that matter, they develop in categorically more substantive ways, and develop capacities which change who they will be as adults, ready to make a real impact in the world.

Individual Learning Pathways and Plans

Charting a course for growth and belonging

> At Acera, our goal is to create a learning environment in which students can become the best version of themselves, given each students' unique capacities, needs, and passions. At the heart of this effort is a student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

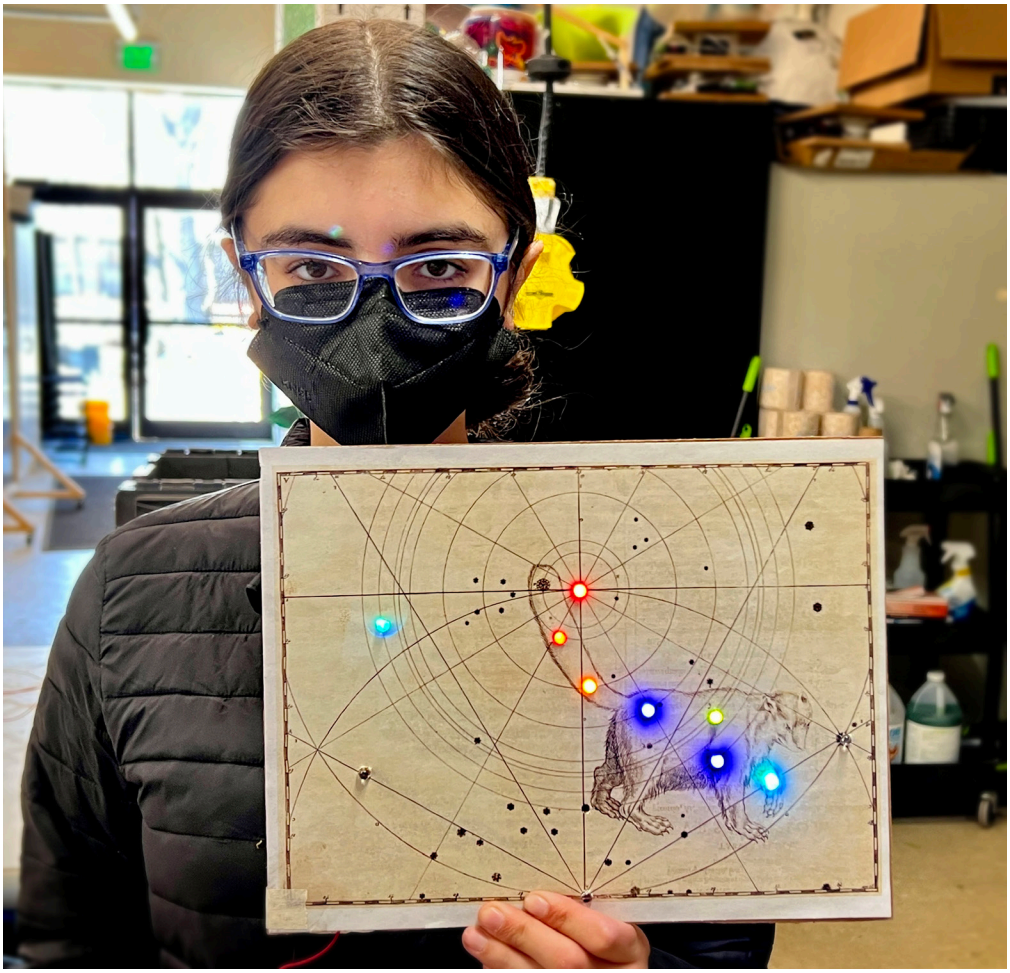
ILPs are living documents with a customized runway for learning – offering choice and voice – that engages each child both as part of a school community and in a way that honors their own capacities and interests. The plans include a summary of the student's areas of strength, opportunities for growth, and individual goals. These are adjusted year-to-year based on students' needs and growth.

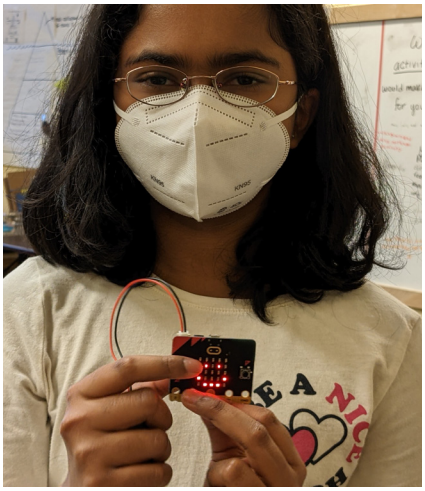
For example, one student's writing goal may be to develop learning strategies for critical reading and literary analysis, which then strengthens their own writing. Another student in the same class may need to establish proficiency in writing by utilizing literary conventions, such as grammar, spelling and mechanics.

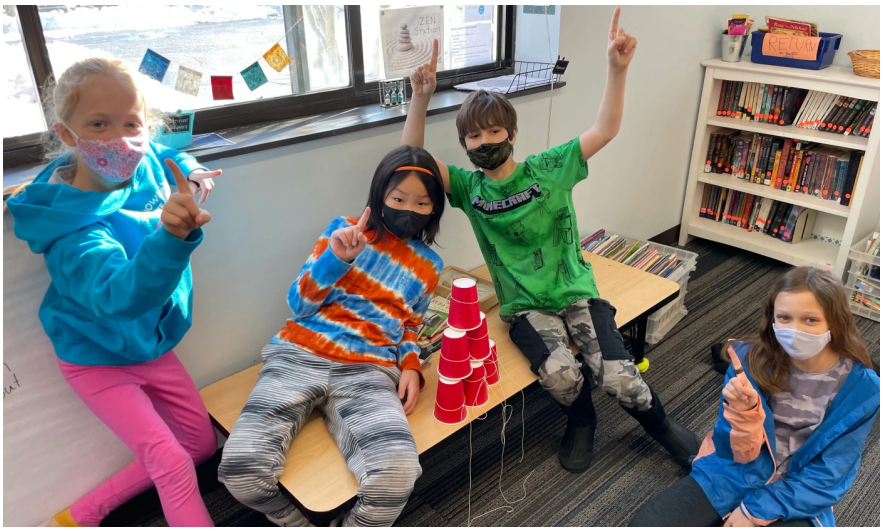
The process begins with low-stress qualitative assessments in math and reading at the start of the year, alongside a custom hand-off from the prior teacher (or admissions team), integrating input from parent listening conferences. Input from teachers, counselors and specialists is included in a documented ILP as well as the customized learning pathway through the year. We chart a course for growth based upon where each child is at the start of the year, rather than based on age-determined norms of children. Through the school year, each child's learning pathway unfolds in a highly differentiated way; input from core teachers, counselors, and specialists enables high engagement, inquiry-rich and project-based learning experiences that interweave systems and critical thinking with learning and practice of essential skills.

Plans are also designed to foster a student's sense of belonging and connectedness within the Acera community. One student, for example, may be encouraged to grow her confidence as a leader and public speaker, focusing on her willingness to take the risk of being "seen" in the broader community.

Complementing the ILPs are Acera's narrative report cards, which – rather than a single grade – are a comprehensive summary of each student's progress towards their own learning goals. Year after year, ILPs provide kids with unbounded access to learning, offering every student opportunity according to their ability.







Teachers as Curriculum Creators

Pivoting Learning to Follow – and Deepen – Student Interest and Engagement

> The beauty of Acera is that the school really values "teacherpreneurship." As teachers, we have the flexibility to weave in those critical skills that we think are necessary for students to be successful after they leave us. We also have the chance to delve into topics that focus on what kids are going through today. I love that I get the support I need to make sure that my classes are really fruitful for them.

– MARLON DAVIS, EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SPECIALIST AND SOCIAL SCIENCES ELECTIVE TEACHER

High-engagement learning at Acera relies on our teachers' conscious creation of situations and opportunities that are interesting to kids. Scenarios, dialogues, simulations, and innovative assignments (make a podcast, video, comic strip, piece of art, etc.) pique student curiosity because they are novel, hands-on, and/or relevant to students' interests.

To achieve this, teachers at Acera are empowered to be true facilitators of discovery, with the ability to pivot learning in order to follow – and deepen – student interest. This freedom from pre-ordained curricula enables teachers to observe what students are excited about, and then craft and adapt learning conversations, experiences, simulations, projects, and problem-based challenges around ideas and challenges which capture – and sustain – their imagination, wonder and drive.

A compelling example of this was how teachers adapted learning plans, in real-time, at the start of the Ukrainian/Russian conflict in spring 2021. Students, understandably, walked into school distressed and worried.

In response, Acera Lower School teacher Deborah Barolsky added European geography and developmentally appropriate history into core classroom time for her second and third graders. In Upper School, teacher Vered Brooks's class was deep into designing their utopian society for their Mars Colony simulation project. The Ukraine/Russia conflict resulted in a student who felt distressed about the class preference for building a communist society on the red planet. Vered responded by engaging with care, and by then bringing a new perspective into the class – that of a parent's real-life experiences being raised in Communist Russia.

This gave new input to the class as they considered their governmental system. The result? Students had responsive educational sessions which expanded how they could understand and safely process current events that troubled them.

Over time, this authentic engagement fosters diligence, growth and motivation beyond school, and galvanizes students' desires to initiate, make positive impacts and continue learning beyond the bounds of school and into life.

Student-Led Passion Projects

Students self-initiate passion projects through freedom and support

> How can we as educators unleash the initiative and creativity inherent in all children? How can we harness students' desire for independence while supporting them in learning what it takes to reach a goal? How do we create an environment in which students can explore their ideas as well as the critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, systems thinking and other 21st century skills they will need to succeed in life?

For Upper School students, Acera's answer to these questions is an approach we call Inquiry, Making and Passion Projects (IMPP). Developed and refined over several years – and coordinated by Computer Science and Games Specialist Danny Fain – our IMPP program provides students with the freedom to generate their own projects and experiment with different essential skills. At the same time, mentors provide the scaffolding it takes for students to not get lost in possibility, stay productive, and actualize their goals.

Every week, students have two separate blocks of student-led time to define and follow through on a passion project. Mentors and content coaches are available to advise on students' independent projects. These adults may be specialist teachers at our school – in subjects like life sciences, computer science, engineering, and the arts – or practitioners from fields such as journalism, robotics, medicine, or economics who come on board to support a specific project.

Teachers and mentors provide feedback, and then students develop a prospectus that organizes next steps via a timeline and project plan. With the help of their mentors, students document their work to record obstacles, observations and milestones, and to provide the backbone of a final reflection they write, draw or film at the end of their IMPP project.

Their efforts are celebrated twice each year at Acera's IMPposium, a culminating event during which students present their projects to the broader Acera community. In 2021-2022, the topics explored by our students were deeply varied, including:

- Cybersecurity research: Acera students Lucas and Sam looked at vulnerabilities and issues with online security. They studied documentation of historically significant database breaches. After examining the vulnerabilities that led to each breach, the duo thought about potential patches.
- Community playground equipment: Niha and Eliana designed and constructed a climbing wall for the Acera playground with their project mentor, Acera Engineering, Math and Woodshop Specialist Josh Briggs.
- Programmable plant watering device: Working with her mentor, Acera Technology Educator David Olson, student Ren programmed a system that automatically waters houseplants, creating a solution for people who travel.
- Spice racks for a cause: Jonathan designed and made wooden spice racks, and created a business on Etsy to sell them, with all profits going to the National Forest Foundation.

IMP Projects are a way to engage all children in topics that matter to them, allow them to take ownership of a project, and support them on their journey toward bringing their idea to life. It's not about perfection; it's students exploring ideas, making mistakes, and learning from them.


BOSTON
GENUINE

Fostering Trust, Creativity and Risk-Tasking

In one classroom, "All the World's a Stage"

> My philosophy of teaching is to establish a system where I can encourage the students to take risks to develop higher order thinking, communication, and confidence. At Acera, I can use that to find a theme that I can mold into anything, and All the World's a Stage becomes universal.
>
> – DAVID FODASKI, CORE CLASSROOM TEACHER

When Upper School Bridge Teacher David Fodaski (or "Fo" to students) entered his Acera classroom, he was immediately struck by the space. "When I saw the room I thought 'this can be converted into a black box theater space,'" said Fo. "And by bringing in production values, like lights, sound equipment, and drapery, it creates an open space for creativity and cross pollination of ideas from different collaborators."

With that inspiration, Fo anchored his school year around the theme “All the World’s a Stage,” an idea that started small, and culminated in a work of truly collaborative art, with students and teachers alike working toward a single vision. Fo opened by asking students to consider the question “what is a stage?” A stage, they determined, is a place to communicate ideas, and a platform to invite others to experience them collectively. What collection of ideas did they want to create with that?

One of the first exercises was The Rant, a process used by directors to elicit emotions from actors. Students wrote pretend rants using the prompt “if you were stomping up the stairs and slamming the door, what would you be angry about?” and then performed them for their classmates.

According to Fo, the collective safety, ensemble-building, and risk-taking of the rants took off, solidifying the classroom dynamic of creativity and trust. “Release with this group was so fast and immediate. All of the usual suspects of students whom I knew would definitely get up there and rant, did so and had a great time,” he said. “And then the reluctant students started to join in and take that chance. And then a student who had never written a rant wanted to do one. When he felt that energy around him, he felt compelled to take that risk and take that shot.”

The rants led to a poetry show, which brought in visual elements with the collaboration of Fine Arts Teacher Claudia Thomas. Then the theme expanded into world-building, in which students created two separate cultures – complete with artifacts – and then each group “staged” their treasures in Acera’s adventure playground for the other to dig up and decipher.

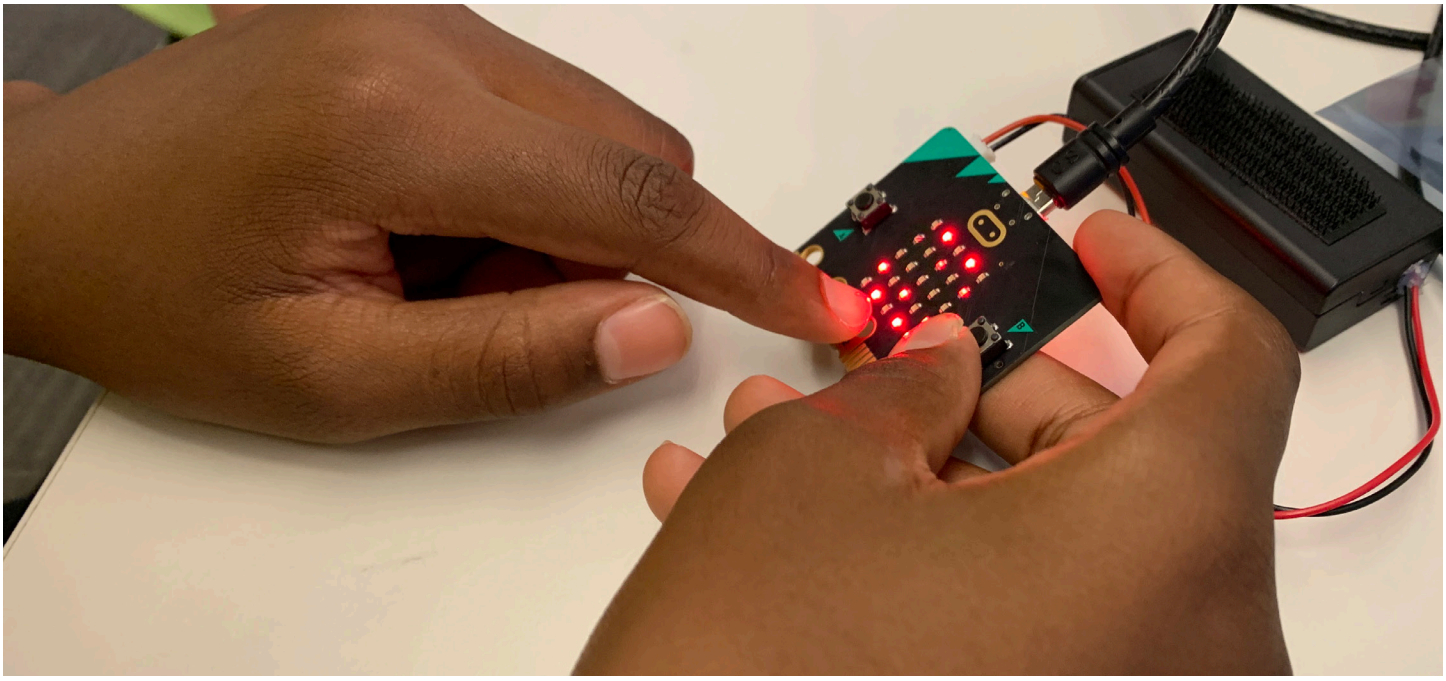
All of this teamwork culminated in the spring of 2022’s production of Tim Kelly’s play “The Butler Did It,” with the acting, lighting, set design and stage management all done by students. The show was performed in the Acera Commons to multiple sold-out crowds of parents, faculty, and fellow students.

“I believe All the World’s a Stage because it’s about making impressions on other human beings and our collective experience with one another,” said Fo. “That’s tough to pull off, and yet it’s that collaborative negotiation that happens between staff and students that really builds the core capacities of perspective taking and leadership in a holistic way that meets the needs of everybody, while also putting a major culminating event together. It’s just so special.”

Inquiry and Question-Driven Learning

What is the purpose of technology?

> Sir Tim Berners-Lee, computer scientist and one of the original creators of the internet, is openly disappointed in the tech industry. While he created the web with equity in mind, he told Vanity Fair in 2018 he now worries it could be the “destroyer of worlds” and is focusing his endeavors on solutions.



With this in mind, students in Jamie Schefen's high school class took on the question "what is the purpose of technology?" in their lives, in history, and in the world.

They began by examining postcards from 1899 which predicted what life in 2000 would look like, and then created their own visions of what 2121 would look like, and what role artificial intelligence might play.

Then – using a dystopian story for inspiration – students launched group work in which they imagined they created the first AI with the ability to learn. Tasked with assigning the AI an objective to help fix a world issue, groups collaborated to design a set of very specific directions to make sure that their worlds were kept safe. They also engaged in debates, such as the ethics around how to program a self-driving car.

Finally, the class shifted its focus to the internet specifically. Ms. Jamie asked them first to brainstorm what students felt the purpose of the internet is today. They then researched the original purpose of the internet, and tracked its history to determine how and when its purpose shifted. This challenged the students to question how one can determine the purpose of something that is constantly changing.

Throughout the process, new questions arose. Does the way the web functions – and make money – prevent it from being utilized in a purposeful way that helps society, rather than a purposefully addictive thing to sell its users? How has the rise of social media created social problems? Who is responsible for finding solutions?

The result? A classroom of students with insightful ideas to share about the importance and dangers of technology in our lives, and some highly informed – and purposeful – consumers of the internet.

Project-Based Learning

Students Consider Future Dwellings in Boston and Barcelona

> What is a home? How does our culture and our identity influence our housing? How can we design sustainable homes that are ready for the future?

Upper School students from both Acera and the Escola L'Horitzó school in Barcelona considered these and other questions during a three-week exchange program in the spring of 2022.

The “Future Dwellings” project – which included elements of research, design, building, and humanities – challenged the students to draw connections between housing, culture, community, and climate change by exploring essential questions like:

- How is “home” a cultural concept?
- How might new or renovated dwellings of people living in Barcelona and Boston look and function in 2037?
- What does it mean to have “sustainable homes” and how can homes be designed to become more sustainable in the near future?
- How does dwelling design depend on available resources and infrastructure?
- How does housing relate to other parts of the community, such as access to employment, transportation, shopping, utilities, and recreation?
- What does it mean for housing to be affordable? What is the role of governments and the private sector in providing affordable housing?

Working in small groups – each with a blend of kids from both Acera and Barcelona – students were tasked with creating a home set in either Barcelona or Boston in the year 2037, making decisions on materials and layout based on local culture and future climate.

Teams came up with conceptual sketches and descriptions on paper, then created digital models and simulations using the real-world modeling tools SketchUp, FloorPlanner, CoSpaces and Energy3D. Finally, the groups brought their virtual designs to life in Acera’s woodshop, building tabletop renditions of their “future dwellings” out of cardboard and wood.

The project culminated in a series of live presentations to students, faculty, parents, and a panel of architects, who were impressed with each group’s innovation, creativity, and careful attention to detail.

Looking ahead, we’re excited to share that our collaboration with Escola L’Horitzó will continue! Acera students will spend two weeks in 2023 in Barcelona, and when they return, we’ll welcome our Barcelona friends to Winchester – a truly enriching experience for all.

Investigation and Iteration in the Science Lab

Electives give students a glimpse into life sciences sector

What is it like to be a scientist?

Authentic learning experiences, engaging in real labs and linking learning to the world are anchor tenants at Acera. “So You Wanna Be in Biotech” and “So You Wanna Be a Forensic Scientist” are exemplar electives in which students investigate and iterate the same way professional scientists do.

“Given that Boston is a significant global biotech hub, I wanted to give kids a sense of what it was like to actually work in science to show them the agony and the ecstasy of both professions,” said Acera Lab Sciences Specialist Michael Hirsch. “I wanted them to experience how challenging it can be for forensic scientists to have to put together a complete picture from incomplete data. And – for the biotech one – to become accustomed to failure and reiteration, because part of what makes a good scientist is the ability to stick with it after failure and to learn something from it.”

Michael Hirsch and other career changer specialist teachers at Acera invent electives which bring the world alive for students. Once pilot tested, the curriculum from Acera becomes eligible for inclusion in Acera's nonprofit public school outreach program AceraEI (Acera Education Innovation, www.aceraei.org) which partners with public school teachers to incorporate more inquiry-based and hands-on learning into their classrooms. AceraEI offers replicable curriculum toolkits and, in the case of lab sciences sessions, trains public school teachers as part of AceraEI Life Sciences Change Agent Teacher workshop series.

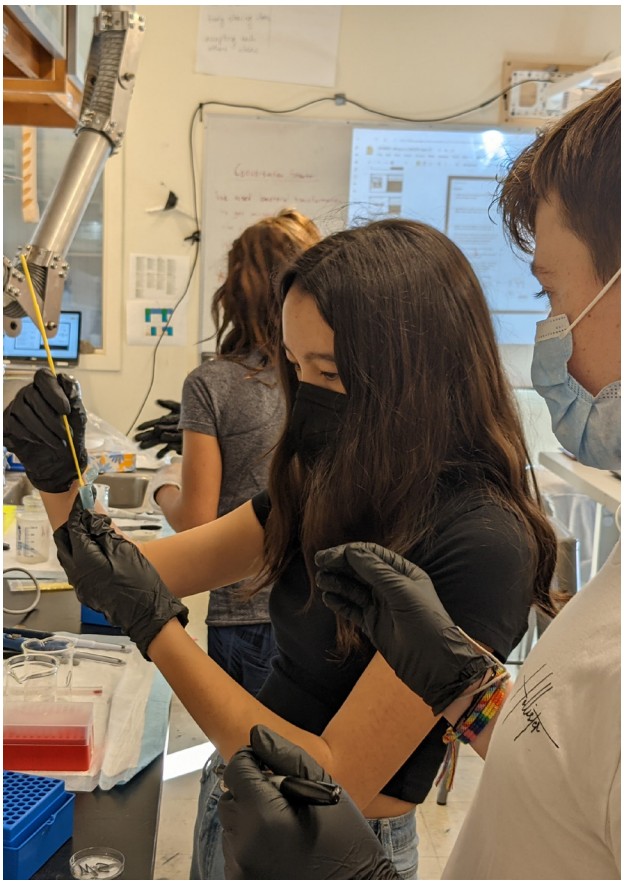
In 2021-2022, students took on the role of budding biotech scientists, and were introduced to the concepts, tools, techniques, and debates within drug development. They began by making their own ginger ale using fermentation, which enabled students to use natural products to create a commercial one. They then advanced to a series of biotech experiments, including bacterial transformations and an extended unit on CRISPR and gene editing, putting Acera students on the cutting edge of real world science.

In Forensics, Michael combined elements of biology, chemistry, physics, deductive reasoning, and creativity to guide students in solving a series of crimes throughout different time periods using era appropriate techniques. They explored ballistics and trigonometry, models and kinematic motion, and predicted the weight of objects using water displacement, all through an interconnected character-based narrative. Each separate investigation combined the science behind the analysis with a practical hands-on exploration of gathering evidence from materials left at the scene of the crime. Each investigation led students closer to identifying the perpetrator while exonerating others from an extensive cast of characters.

For Michael, watching his students become deeply engaged in this learning was gratifying.

"That's when you know students are thinking 'this is a lot less scary and intimidating than I thought.' I wanted to show them that anyone can do this professionally. Not only is it viable, but we're living in the biotech capital of the world," Michael said. "For a student to do something in eighth grade and think 'wow, this is fun! Maybe I'll take harder science in high school or maybe I'll major in science,' they'll know that there's a well-paying job right down the road for them."


CAUTION
Safety glasses required
1AD



Flexible Thinking and Courage in Math Class...and Beyond

> What if math class was a place where kids' problem solving and deep thinking skills could come alive, and a place where they grow in their confidence and adaptability?

Mathematics learning can be authentically engaging, and it is the perfect place for students to take on the much sought after "growth mindset." Rather than focusing on "getting the right answer," math class can be an incredible place to bring about flexible thinking skills.

At Acera, the school year starts with a series of math problem-solving exercises, offered up in an encouraging way with adults who observe and coach them along. This “snapshot” correlates with placement in math classes that honor their capacities and needs, instead of just their age. In the 2021-22 school year, Acera teachers led 22 different math classes for our 144 students.

Ability-based math classes could become feasible at many schools through scheduling math classes at the same time across multiple classrooms and, ideally, multiple grades. Teachers can then define groups which fit the students’ capabilities, placing students in the right level and right learning style and approach to best suit them in what they are ready to learn.

A key part of fluency is not just knowing facts but also knowing how to think about solving a problem most efficiently, and picking the best strategy. Students get to engage deeply in a way that fits their capacity, and experience the authentic satisfaction which comes from trying hard, figuring things out, balancing that equation just right, and solving a problem. That kind of intellectual satisfaction creates an appetite for trying new and more challenging things. When habits of flexible thinking start to hatch, they can be generalized to other areas of learning and life.

This “appetite to try a new challenge” was on display this year when students at Acera placed first in the state – and 15th worldwide – in the Middle School 1-400 Division of Purple Comet Math Meet, an event that drew more than 2,800 teams from 55 countries. In this meet, the focus is on how well the team can solve a problem together, not what kids have memorized. They get to practice teamwork, utilizing everyone’s math skills and reaching a consensus on the answers.

In this type of learning structure, new possibilities open up for math experiences for all kids. These kinds of experiences then generate a new sense of self and new capabilities which far surpass math alone, and inform the adults they will become.

Practicing Invention and Collaboration within Simulations

The Culture of a Colonized Mars

How do we create an equitable culture?

That's the question students in Vered Brooks's Upper School Bridge class asked, then attempted to answer in a project that wove together research, writing, science and role play.

Using their classroom theme of "culture" as a starting point, students spent time exploring their own cultures and discussing what elements made up a culture, and then considered how they could design one of their own. Realizing that it is slow and challenging to change culture that is already entrenched, students were inspired to imagine a colony on Mars, which would have different rules and expectations than communities on Earth.

"The students understood that culture and laws/rules are a feedback loop, so a shifted set of cultural expectations needs a shifted set of rules, both spoken and unspoken," said Core Classroom Teacher Vered Brooks. "We began with a 'veil of ignorance' thought experiment – about what kinds of rules

you would design if you didn't know what your role would be – and then we dug into what those roles would actually entail."

Working in small groups, the class researched different areas in order to design for different pieces of a colony, with each group assigned a specific topic. A "science and building group" researched the conditions and engineering constraints of building on another planet, and considered how those factors would impact design. The "rules and roles group" created the rules for the society and the roles that people would hold by looking at various other governments and systems that already exist in their research, such as Native American councils, submarine crews, and law codes in other countries.

Finally, the students created an organizational structure for the Mars colony, extrapolating from what they felt worked in other places. Once all groups had done their research and created their Mars specific designs, students chose roles that they would like and designed a persona with a backstory and family history.

The unit culminated in a week-long "Life on Mars" classroom simulation – including one overnight sleepover at school – with periods for work, leisure, rest, and eating/exercising interspersed throughout their days. Students were able to get into a routine and see what it was like to do their jobs, entertain themselves, and be self-sufficient within the confines of the group. And because things can go wrong in any culture, students had to problem solve together during a simulation scenario when a meteorite hit their base!

"Everyone needed to drop everything and work on repair and clean up," said Vered. "I think that's when the students bonded the most, when they worked together toward the common goal of saving the base." For Vered's students, the biggest takeaway was that shifting a culture is a long and challenging process. "Students came in with certain expectations and assumptions, and it was hard to shake them," Vered said. "Even when they attempted to design a character that would act and think in a certain way."

Learning to take on a perspective that is not your own, and solving problems with a systemic view in mind is at the heart of learning at Acera, setting students up to be thinkers, innovators and leaders in the future paths they take.


Welcome to math class!
1. Find a chair and a place at
able to sit.
settled
3. Start today's warmup!

Board of Directors

Acera's Board of Directors has as its foremost charter to safeguard the fiscal stability and sustainability of the school. Its approach is modeled more after the for-profit sector than the typical non-profit board approach, enabling the rapid and flexible growth of Acera.

Holly Whittemore, C.P.A., Chair

Head of Finance, Nimbus Discovery

Michael K. Barron, J.D., Secretary

Partner, Morgan Lewis

Richard J. Morello, M.B.A., Treasurer

President, Life Sciences Division Aptus Health

Courtney Dickinson, B.A.,

Founder & Director, Acera School

David Grayzel, M.D.

Partner, Atlas Venture

Jane Moulding, A.L.M.

Principal, SmarterWisdom Consulting
Former Head of School, The Cambridge School of Weston

Greg Phelps, M.B.A.

Independent Advisor
Former Chairman of the Board,
Charles River School

Acera Staff

*Full-time Acera Staff for the 2021-22 school year. Additional part-time staff not listed here include math, science, and creativity station teachers. A full list of all staff is available at aceraschool.org/people.

Courtney Dickinson, Founder & Director

B.A., Dartmouth College. Certified Teacher Leadership & Company Culture Consultant. Culture Architect, Sapient Corporation.

Deborah Barolsky, Core Classroom Teacher

M.S., Wheelock College
B.A., Swarthmore College

Tim Bilodeau, Engineering and Maker Space Specialist

B.S., Northeastern University

Faith Blake, Enrichment Programs Manager

M.A., Stanford University
B.S., Tufts University

Josh Briggs, Engineering, Woodshop and Math Specialist

M.S., University of New Hampshire
B.S. and B.A., University of Notre Dame

Vered Brooks, Core Classroom Teacher

M.Ed., Lesley University
B.A., Bennington College

Malcolm Campbell, Senior Counselor

M.A., Counseling Psychology, C.I.I.S.
B.A., Fairhaven College

Alyssa Colby, Core Classroom Teacher

M.A., University of Maine, Orono
M.A., Brandeis University
B.A., Wheaton College

Kerry Crisley, Marketing and Public Relations Lead

M.S, Boston University
B.A., University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Alexis Daniels, Strategic Initiatives Manager

Doctoral Student, Johns Hopkins University
M.S., Tufts University
B.A., Tufts University

Marlon Davis, Executive Function & Writing Specialist

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education
B.A., Providence College

Bob Defandorf, Core Classroom Teacher

M.Ed., Lesley University
B.A., Wesleyan University

Queenie Desulme, Operations and Administrative Assistant

Jonathan Dietz, Engineering Specialist

MAT, Simmons College
SB, Electrical Engineering, MIT
SB, Life Science, MIT

Ruma Dutta, Core Classroom Teacher

M.Ed., Lesley University
B.A., Mount Holyoke College

Kevin Duval, Facilities Manager

B.S., Wentworth Institute of Technology

Danny Fain, Computer Science & Games Specialist

S.B., Massachusetts Institute of Technology

David Fodaski, Core Classroom Teacher

M.Ed, Lesley University
B.A., Lesley University

Rachel Fuerstman, Literacy, Writing, Executive Function and Dyslexia Specialist

M.A., Brandeis University,
B.S., Vassar

Camila Garcia-Enriquez, Visual Arts Teacher

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education
B.A., Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba

Sigourney Hamilton, Student Support Provider

B.A., Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Michael Hirsch, Lab Sciences Specialist and Curriculum Coordinator

M.A.T., Salem State
B.A., Clark University

Sara Honeywell, Director of Operations & Administration

B.A., Berklee College of Music

Laura Inglese, Literacy, Writing and Dyslexia Specialist

M.Ed, UMass Lowell
B.A., Keene State College

Sam Kitchens, School Counselor

B.S., Tufts University

Anastasia Leyden, Core Classroom Teacher

M.Ed., Lesley University
B.A., Williams College

Kim Machnik, Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning Coordinator

M.S., Lesley University
B.A., Brandeis University

Jenifer McGuinn, Core Classroom Teacher

M.A.T., Tufts University
B.A., Simmons College

Stephanie McKay, Arts and Performance Specialist

M.Ed, Lesley University
M.A., Lesley University
B.F.A., Modern Dance, University of the Arts

Alazá Merrill, Cross Classroom Teacher

B.A., Worcester State University

Ashley Metz, Math and Science Specialist

M.S., Lesley University
B.A., Boston University

Carly Morin, Cross Classroom Enrichment Specialist

M.A., Indiana University Bloomington
B.A. Northeastern University

Alice Neville, Executive Assistant

B.A., Boston College

Pei Ng, Administrative Assistant

B.S., Deakin University

David Olson, Technology Specialist

M.Ed., Lesley University
B.A., University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Marianne O'Grady, Director of Lower School

M.S., Wheelock College
B.S., Fitchburg State University

George Papayannis, Director of Upper School

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education
M.A., Columbia University Teachers College
B.S., Drexel University

Kei Phillip, School Counselor and Movement Specialist

M.A., Columbia University Teachers College
B.A., Barnard College

C. Trent Ramsey, Director of Strategic Advancement

Graduate Certificate in Grant-Writing,
Fort Hays State University
B.A., Birmingham-Southern College

Eileen Sauer, Student Support Program Manager

M.S, Simmons College
B.A., UMass Lowell

Jamie Schefen, Core Classroom Teacher

M.A., Columbia University
B.A., Northeastern University

Debbie Seidell, Math Curriculum Coordinator

M.S., University of Washington
B.A., Brown University

Sarah Slubowski, Teacher Mentor

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education
B.A., Trinity College

Claudia Thomas, Fine Arts Enrichment Specialist

BFA, Animation, Massachusetts College of Art & Design

Pam Tricca, Literacy, Writing and Dyslexia Specialist

Certificate, Orton Gillingham Theory and Techniques, The Carroll School
B.A., Emmanuel College

Lauren Wibbels, Core Classroom Teacher

M.A., University of Northern Colorado
B.A., Nebraska Wesleyan University

Sandra Zuckerman, Director of Admissions

B.A., University of Colorado
Professional Diploma, Berklee College of Music

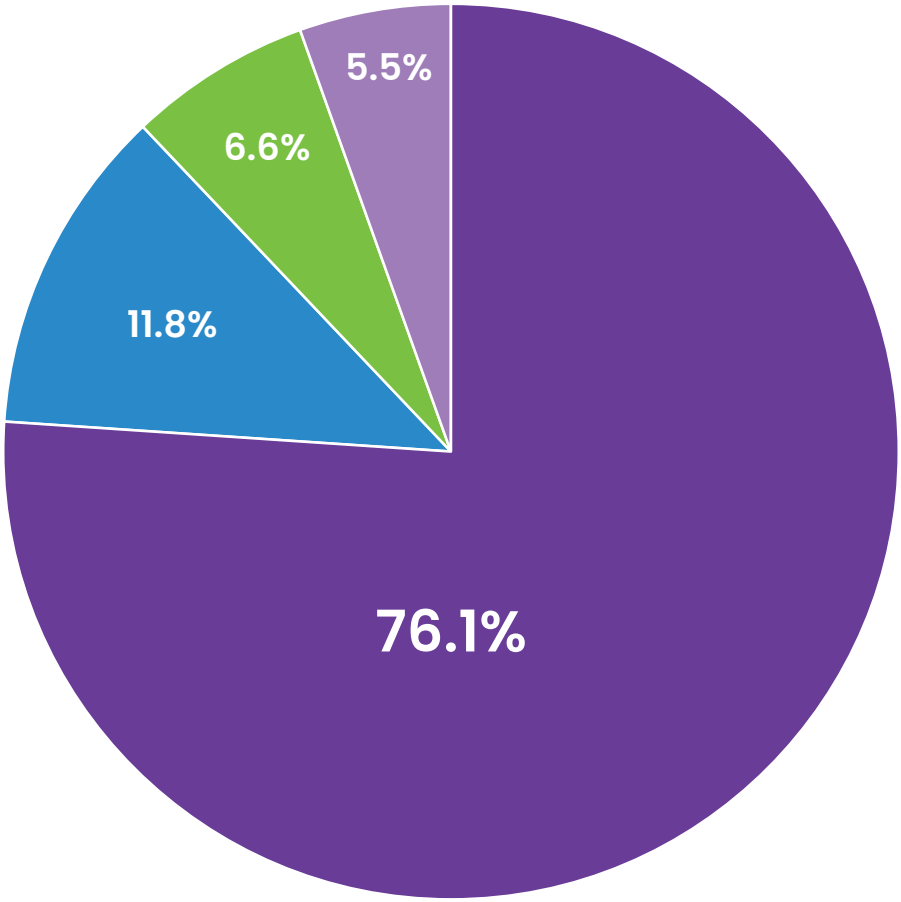
Sarah Zuckerman, Director of Education & Innovation

Ed.M., Harvard Graduate School of Education
B.A., Indiana University


HANGRY
SHARK

Financials Overview

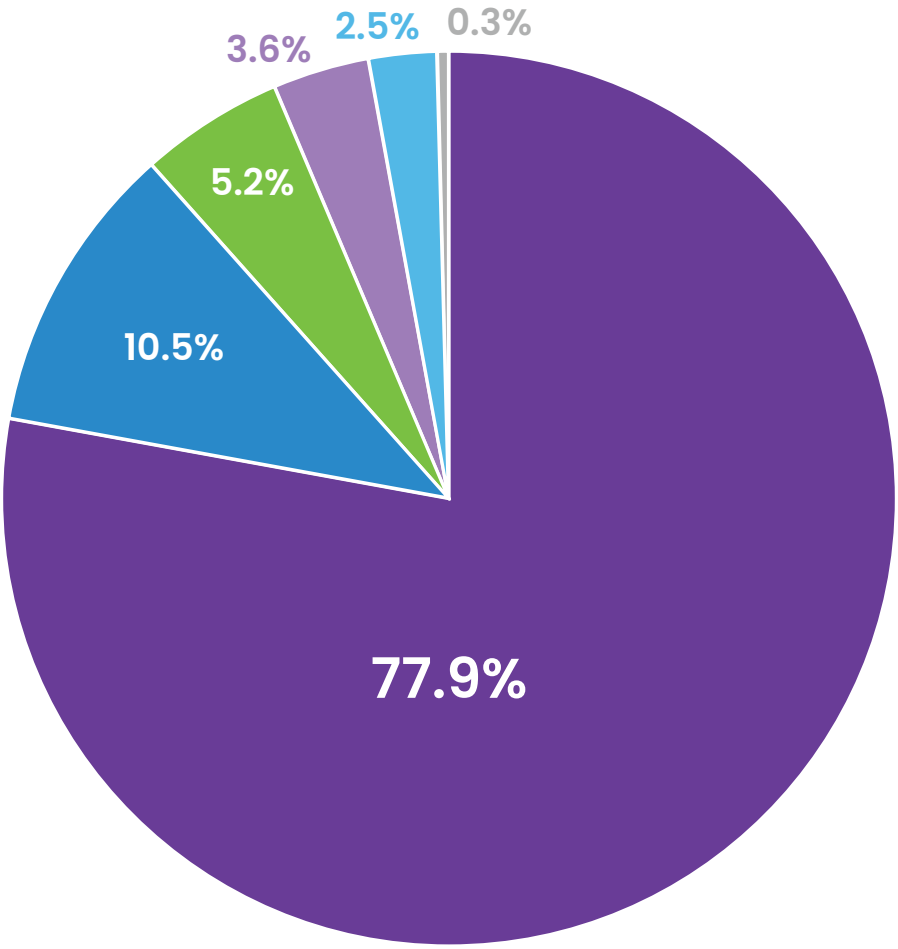
Income



INCOME*	YTD Actual 2022
Gross School Tuition (includes Student Support)	4,307,938
Other Revenue	666,148
Summer Camp Enrichment	375,233
After School and Vacation Camp Enrichment	308,416
	5,657,735

* $3,000,000 restricted donation received in June 2022 for purchase/renovation

Expenses



EXPENSES	YTD Actual 2022
Salaries Benefits & Taxes	4,105,032
G & A	554,781
Classroom Expenses	273,017
Facilities	187,666
Depreciation	129,340
Education Innovation	18,183
	5,268,019

Fundraising Spotlight

Reed Hollett Enrichment Scholarship Fund Trivia Night

> When I think about the Reed Hollett Enrichment Scholarship Fund, I really think about the word "enrichment." To truly enrich a child's life is to make an impression on them and open their mind to something new. Reed really did enrich his students' lives, and he wanted all kids to have access to this kind of learning, so to me it's a perfect fit that we have this scholarship fund to honor his legacy.
>
> – VANESSA ROMAN, ACERA TEACHER FROM 2011-2020

Acera's 4th annual Trivia Night may have been virtual, but the laughter, joy and camaraderie was very real. Parents, students, faculty, staff, board members and other friends of Acera gathered online in teams of six to earn the title of Trivia Champions (an honor that was won – by one point! – to Team Let's Go Outside) and celebrate the memory of Acera teacher Reed Hollett.

Reed was a beloved Acera specialist teacher who led Acera's after school program, construction corner and a hiking club. Reed engaged each student as an individual and had a special, rare gift for truly seeing and knowing the person within. Reed passed away unexpectedly at the age of 29.

The event raised $15,000 for Acera's enrichment program scholarship fund, ensuring that more kids have the opportunity to experience the hands-on STEAM-rich after school classes, vacation camps, and summer programs.

Acera Giving Priorities

Every year, Acera families, staff, board members and alumni come together to raise essential funds for our school community. Our three major campaigns are:

Acera's Annual Fund: The Annual Fund is Acera's largest fundraising campaign and bridges the gap between tuition and the full cost of an Acera education; it is essential to everything we do at Acera. It supports the general operating budget as well as additional programs, staffing and activities that directly benefits each child at Acera. Acera's Annual Fund campaign is October 1-January 6 every year.

Diversity Scholarship Fund: Created in June 2020 by a generous family donor, the purpose of Acera's Diversity Scholarship Fund is to make Acera's core school day program more accessible for diverse students who qualify for gifted education. In 2021-2022, the Diversity Scholarship Fund was instrumental in increasing diversity at our school.

Reed Hollett Enrichment Scholarship Fund: This fund honoring Acera teacher Reed Hollett, who passed away suddenly in 2015, pays for low-income students to attend Acera's after-school, vacation weeks and summer enrichment programs. In February, Acera hosts a Trivia Night for Parents to raise money for this scholarship fund.

We greatly appreciate everyone's involvement in these campaigns. If you have any questions about any of these initiatives, please feel free to reach out to Trent Ramsey at trent@aceraschool.org. If you would like to make a donation to any of these initiatives, please contact Trent or make a donation at **www.aceraschool.org/giving.**

aceraschool.org

781.729.3489

5 Lowell Avenue Winchester MA 01890