



The Massachusetts School of
Science, Creativity and Leadership

Pop Up Acera Extension School:

Last Updated: April 23, 2020

Remote schooling for the last two months of the school year - amid COVID Crisis

Solicited by an Arlington parent and envisioned on April 15, 2020.

Summary:

Built around high-engagement ideas, topics which matter to students, and interdisciplinary projects, Acera emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, voice, and initiative. Responding to parents' requests, we are launching an extension school for two student cohort groups (grades 6/7 and grades 8/9/10) who will engage around meaningful topics and have a school experience (April 27- June 19) enabling student growth in complex thinking, writing, and initiative in ways that fit each students' abilities and interests.

Acera School did a 10 hour "flip turn" converting to a remote schooling format on March 12, and has since converted its Enrichment electives 3:30-5:30pm and April vacation week to high-engagement programming despite the COVID crisis. We seek to invent a new model of Pop-Up School which could be adopted broadly by public schools in the future, if COVID necessitates rolling school closings next year. Acera REPS (remote extension pop-up school) intends to invent an answer. Join our pilot extension school this spring, to embrace a new model of education which truly captures students' curiosity and frees their potential as future innovators and leaders.

Genesis:

An Arlington MA parent reached out on 4/15, asking Courtney Dickinson, Founder & Head of Acera if a group of families from Arlington could contract to Acera for schooling needs for the rest of the school year; in response, a plan was created that night. The parent who reached out had enrolled her son at Acera School for grades 6,7 & 8.

Approach:

Building on Acera's philosophies about schooling generally and Acera's rapid implementation and success in running remote schooling starting on March 12, we decided to respond to this parent inquiry by piloting a pop up school – Acera REPS (remote extension pop-up school). The school program provides an anchor daily synchronous zoom call which is a class group discussion with a mix of dialogue, direct instruction, community building, a philosophy-salon style exchange of ideas. This core classroom catalyzes a full day's schedule. Substantial teacher discussion, coaching, and classroom experiences create a program from 9am - 3pm or 9am-5:30pm program (depending upon whether or not students enroll in 3:30 – 5:30 Electives offerings.)

Acera Philosophies include:

- Students learn based upon their abilities, needs and interests without limits due to their age or curriculum
- Enable learning which catalyzes students' curiosity and sense of purpose, with learning experiences that are meaningful
- Prioritize development of core capacities (critical thinking and problem solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, perspective taking, leadership, collaboration, ethical decision making) as the priority, over traditional emphasis on "coverage of content"
- Equally value and emphasize students' wellbeing and positive school culture as critical facets of effective education
- Take a student-centered, responsive educational approach, empowering teachers to craft learning pathways for the community and classes generally, and for the individual students particularly, based upon students in a way that adapts over time and is allegiant to the students, not to a pre-ordained curricula or externally established set of learning outcomes
- Teachers reference writing standards and other expectations for Arlington Public schools within their design of the program
- Skills of focus will include core capacities as well as a particular emphasis on writing, analysis, and creating/making.
- As students interests, needs and the program unfolds, Acera teachers will adapt the experience as we learn. We constantly iterate and improve our programs, soliciting input from students as active participants in crafting their own experience.
- We partner with parents to understand, adapt, and help students become the best version of themselves.



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Sample Daily Agenda:

“Core Classroom time” with a shared student cohort group (grades 6/7 together, grades 8/9/10 together) occurs every morning, with discussions, peer coaching, and social group meet-ups in the 9-12:45 timeframe. Other times are experienced differently by each student based upon their abilities (for on-line math), interests (the specific projects they work on, galvanized out of core classroom time) and preferences (enrichment/electives). As teachers get to know their students, they will identify a theme of inquiry and study for the program. Possible theme examples: *Reflecting and being now. OR Societies & Solutions. OR Power, Systems & Change. OR Challenges, Ethics, and Impact. OR Reflecting and Being, Now. Any theme would include a focus on catalyzing self-awareness, growing critical thinking and creative expression, and developing agency of oneself within community.*

- 9-10:30 **Classroom community discussion** on Zoom, inquiry-style learning, student sharing of ideas, pieces, projects.
- 10:30 - 12 **Individual work time** on writing, assignments, projects catalyzed in morning meeting. Teacher 1:1 coaching.
- 12-12:45 **Socialize** Video Hang-out to prepare lunch & eat and/or play games virtually (poker, D&D, etc.)
- 12:45-1:30 **Exercise** requirement: on-line martial arts/ strength / yoga/dance class, outdoor bike / run/ hike.
- 1:30 - 2: **On-line math tutorial** (Acera will curate options (e.g. [Aleks](#)) families will choose and pay for their own path.
- 2-3: **Finalize & Submit products and projects** post the day’s written, math, projects, and exercise products/photos onto Google Classroom / Padlet (tech TBD)
- 3-3:30 Break
- 3:30-5:30 **Enrichment / Elective Courses** High engagement discussion rich and hands-on courses chosen by Student

Possible focus areas of Core Classroom time for each of the 8 week remote school experience:

- 4/ 27: **Build a Community.** *Understand needs, interests, goals. Define unique paths for growth this spring.*
- 5/ 4, 5/11, 5/18: **Respond to my world and each other.** *Reference current events, history, philosophy, culture, science, economics... Interdisciplinary primary source material readings, analysis response essays / podcasts / making projects.*
- 5/25, 6/1, 6/8: **Finding Voice:** *Responding to My World in My Way. Students write, blog, create, invent, catalyze, and make*
- 6/15: **Sharing Out:** *Polishing my projects & and sharing with my community in a culminating event ; What I’ve learned/ made/ written and realized about our world, our time, myself*

Details About Daily Schedule

Below are more details about how a daily agenda might unfold:

9am - 10:30am

Morning Check- in & Class Discussion on Reading & Assignments: (synchronous Zoom call)

- community building work and social / emotional skills awareness and development
 - dialogue on current issues and trends and/ or student annotations from their brief, overnight assigned reading (a current news piece or journal article, psychology non fiction piece, historic piece which is contextually relevant, etc.)
 - Breakout function in Zoom will help assure that all get a chance to have lively, engaging participation.
 - student share-outs and reflections on yesterday's assignments and also longer term assignments given weekly
 - a relevant research / writing / creative expression project for the day which will be posted, in process, by 3pm that afternoon. (has at least some analytical writing, as well as a creative expression component -- art, blog, podcast, imvove, photography, etc.)
- As the session unfolds, some assignments will extend into multiple days.

10:30-12pm

Work time for students on their assignments (periodic Zoom check-in calls with teacher for writing conferences or project coaching or social conflict resolution or support as needed.)

based upon the morning meeting/ discussion. Engage in one-on-one tutoring timeslots with teacher for writing coaching. As is appropriate, student peer coaching meetings can occur, once students are coached on how to coach and give/ hear critical feedback, using a writing rubric they created in a class together, and following social norms they built for their community the first week of the program. A wide array of projects will be emphasized – some will be longer written analytical, some may be brief write-ups to accompany an artistic piece, others will be a podcast they recorded about their reactions, or an interview they decided to conduct as a form of reflection or application of something they realized from the reading or discussion.



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12pm-12:45pm

Socialize

Social connections are always critical and now more than ever, people are longing for them. These are inclusive, small group, student choice driven meet-ups orchestrated by the teacher. There are on-line tools to support productive engagement than can be leveraged based upon kids interests and needs. These meet ups will not be “monitored” actively by a teacher, though issues that emerge can be escalated to a teacher to process as part of morning meeting community building time.

- Mid-day social connection -- "make lunch" together and/or virtual game playing (poker, D&D,)
- Required athletic/ physical exercise activity with post / picture / reflection posted on Padlet/ google classroom -- curated links offered as options (virtual yoga, dance, strength and conditioning class, bike ride, hike, tree climb, etc.) but they need to post "proof" of sweating onto the classroom blog.

12:45 – 1:30

Exercise

This will be required. Proof of exercise is to be posted onto Padlet/Google classroom. A wide array of options are possible. An array of activities will be offered as curated links to students – strength and conditioning classes, yoga, dance classes. Even better? A bike ride, run, or hike outdoors. If there is a creative scavenger hunt or athletic challenge-of-the-day included . . all the better.

1:30pm – 2pm

On-line Math Tutorial

Aleks On line is a tool Acera used one year, many years ago. It is a very effective tool which enables a student assessment and appropriate placement, and individualized assignments and pacing which fit how a student progresses. Graphics show progress, motivating students. Thinking expected is far superior to what one might expect for an on-line based software program. While not ideal, at Acera we believe it is important to be engaged in a math class which honors what each student is ready to learn, rather than be limited by age expectations. Aleks is one program which we are currently aware of which enables that. Along with the community, we may be able to identify and curate many options. Each family will be expected to identify, enroll, and pay for this on their own. It will not be formally “integrated” into the rest of this Pop-up remote learning experience. For students who get particularly engaged in this learning framework, they are their families may choose for them to spend more time each day in this or other similar on-line distance learning programs. Especially for kids who love math or who want to dive deep into learning to code or chemistry and this distance learning format is working for them, they may prioritize that over the humanities and self awareness and writing focused work intended to be emphasized within the 2 – 3 timeslot each day.

2-3pm

Work on & Post in-process and polished work/ projects. Complete morning expectation.

As time allows, continue work on an individual, project choice board project.

Post onto Padlet or Google Classroom (or other tech platform tbd) by 3pm.

3-3:30pm

Break

(Video game playing is highly discouraged; it is a certifiable fact that it makes people grumpy and dramatically reduces people’s ability to transition to a different activity). Additional XP's accrued for creative connection challenges, social service stewardship work, kindness based outreach, creative / making projects. . .

Ideally, Acera Pop Up School Students make their experience “whole” by also participating in electives:

3:30 - 5:30

Elective/Enrichment Course offerings

Vary each season. Typical options include things like. .

ModelUN	Creative Computing	Maker Space Art	Dramatic Interpretations
Rube Goldberg Machines	Adobe Photoshop	Cooking	Economics
Health & Identity Education	Home-base Woodshop	Simulations & Social Systems	
Science Labs:	Secret Life of Plants	Microbiome	Gene Editing & Genome



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Assessment:

- **Formative assessment** occurs as daily observations that inform teacher practices, impacting how class discussions, instruction and plans unfold each day and over time.
- The core classroom teacher, as part of the final week of school, will invite parents to a **student/ parent conference** in which students and adults reflect on the process and growth through the process. Specific examples will be referenced. This discussion will be, if the student permits, recorded, as “live” narrative report card.
- On-line math tutorial chosen by the family is likely to include progress and end – of – unit evaluations which will also be notes of progress. Typically, good math programs show progress against mastery of specific concepts in math, rather than a “grade” as is traditionally given in school.
- Acera does not give grades, rather choosing to focus on tapping students intrinsic motivation to learn without the distraction of a “grade” as an extrinsic motivator – fear or reward.
- There will be a **culminating event** as part of the last week of this experience. Parents will be included in this event (on Zoom). This will function as a “performance of understanding” and a live way for students to demonstrate what they have learned and how they have grown.



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Core Capacities We Foster at Acera:

Rather than a traditional focus on knowledge acquisition and skills, we feel it is equally and perhaps more important to focus on developing students' "Core capacities" and habits of mind. While schools are typically allegiant to age-based norms and common curricula, we are allegiant to developing these habits of mind. We invert the approach – we engage students' sense of purpose and tap intrinsic motivation, we build experiences for students through essential questions and challenges and by inciting awareness and care, and students and teachers together teach and coach into these conversations and projects with content by reading primary sources, researching, sharing, doing mini-lectures, and via committing to and following through on assignments and projects which are written and others which might be three dimensional or artistic or creative in a different format. Along the way, regardless of the actual content or skills being targeted, teachers always also focus and prioritize learning and coaching in these areas which are durable – they last over your life and make all the difference as an adult in your ability to have positive impact.

Systems Thinking:

See the whole perspective and the parts, across social, cultural, societal, scientific, and historic perspectives. Understand the interconnectedness of forces and actions.

Perspective Taking:

Awareness that the place and experiences of the viewer fundamentally affects what they see / how they see. Develop capacity to see through the eyes of others.

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving:

Inquire deeply, analyze and relate different aspects to each other, break things down and recombine them together to assess a situation and address a need

Collaboration:

Work with others to create something and to achieve a result which supercedes the contributions of any one individual.

Creativity:

Free thought and inquiry resulting in original work or novel approaches to express an idea. Being a divergent thinker and solution creator.

Emotional Intelligence:

Self awareness to know your gifts and challenges, self regulation to control impulses and focus your potential, awareness of the impact of self on others, and capacity to read the group and take the role which is needed

Ethical Decision Making:

Make decisions and choices best upon values and a sense of morality about what is right.

Leadership:

Empower to see needs and step forward to make a difference. Rally others in relevant ways with original ideas (and/or against real world needs). Have a vision for change and bring that vision into reality, combining contributions of many to bring it to life.



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SAMPLE Elective / Enrichment 3:30-5:30 Daily Courses

Based upon teacher availability, students’ ideas, and family requests, we constantly create and galvanize new offerings in core and enrichment/summer programs. Here is one sample draft of what offerings could be in an after school / enrichment schedule. The actual offerings in spring 2020 will depend upon student/parent input and specialist teacher availability.

If you are interested to be a parent galvanizer – to help “Craft a Class” and are confident you can garner the student enrollment needed to make an after school class a “go” please contact our Enrichment Program Manager with your ideas!

faith@aceraschool.org

Teacher	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lab Sciences Could include LabXchange by Amgen Foundation	9 th -12 th Grade Gene editing, secret life of plants, microbiome.	6 th -10 th grade Biowearables & Inventions for Me Enroll 2x week.	9 th -12 th grade Lab science class Enroll 3X week	6 th – 10 th grade Biowearables & Inventions for Me Enroll 2x week.	9 th – 12 th grade Enroll 3X week Mon, Wed, Fri
Maker Space, Art & Architecture	Programmable performance: Tell My Story Enroll 2X week	eFashion, circuitry, Arduino: Create My Design Idea 2-3 times/ week	Constructing a fort/sculpture/bench In your backyard with found natural objects	eFashion, circuitry, Arduino 2 times/week	Programmable performance: Tell a Story to share a novel perspective Enroll 2X week
Social Systems & Simulations	Power, change, & humanity: Putting Revolutions On Trial 2X week	Philosophy Salon: Strategies for argumentation to impress your friends ☺ 1x / week	Power, change, & humanity: Putting Revolutions On Trial 2X week	Philosophy Salon: Applications to Contemporary Issues 1X week	Genesis of World Religions 1X week
Engineering, Computing & environmental Science	Composting systems, gardening, Enroll 1x week.	Biomaterials: Climate Change Engineering Solutions Enroll 2x week.	Learning to code to create something new Enroll 1-2 x week	Biomaterials: Climate Change Engineering solutions Enroll 2x week.	Learning to code to create a game or tell a story Enroll 1-2 x week

Other Elective options we consider offering are based on other programs we’ve offered over the years. . .

Theatre & Dramatic Interpretations, Literature Book Club, Song Writing, Modern Dance, Film Making, Biomimicry in Art & Architecture, US Gov’t, Societies & Social Movements, Economics, Statistics, Ethical Decision making and the Law, Maker Creating, Coding& 3D printing, Adobe Photoshop Creations, Neuroscience, Psychology,

We also offer a wide array of more enrichment and less academic types of programs. Please see our website to get a sense of what is currently on offer! [Electives & Enrichment 3:30 – 5:30](#) [Summer Program](#)



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Enroll here for:

Core Classroom Experience Monday-Friday, 9am-3pm, April 27-June 19, 2020

\$2800

Option: Elective 3:30-5:30pm courses:

Sign up through Acera Enrichment website: <https://www.aceraschool.org/enrichment-programs/after-school-programs/>

Starting April 24, We'll populate our [After School Enrichment enrollment form](#) with *more* spring options for middle school and high school students, with programming slated to start May 4.

Contact popup@aceraschool.org with all questions, requests, feedback, and ideas.

Parent Roles: Advocator: Lead point for / create / join a team to work with your public school district
 Galvanizer: Coalesce and catalyze a group of parents to enroll their students in Pop-Up School
 Option: Coalesce a crew of kids and craft a class to add to electives or summer program
 Contact popup@aceraschool.org to plug in and participate in this effort or to bring a new program alive!

Note: We are a 501©3 non profit school program. We were founded as a “bootstrap start up” which means that we had no money to help us become established. We fund our operations out of program fees. This is our tenth year in operation. While we have financial aid stipends, we currently have a financial aid waiting list.

Launch Calendar:

- Wednesday April 15: Parent asks Acera about whether they would contract to a group of parents?
 Courtney Dickinson creates this Pop Up Program overview guide to outline an Acera approach
- Thursday April 16: Arlington, MA parent shares Pop Up program outline to prospective families and invites to Info Session
- Friday April 17: Zoom Information Session & Discussion re: parents hopes and requests
- Saturday April 18: Zoom Info Session & Discussion
- Sunday April 19: Zoom Info Session & Discussion
- Monday April 20: Zoom Info Session & Discussion
- Tuesday April 21: Enrollment due by 10pm. Acera makes go/ no go decision
- Wednesday April 22: Acera decides to launch. Hires core teachers. Plans tech platform, etc. Acera starts to market program.
- Thursday April 23: Info Session & Discussion
- Friday April 24: Info Session + Introductions/ inclusion of two core classroom teachers
- Saturday April 25: Info Session & Discussion
- Monday April 27: Program Opens

Summer 2020:

** New **Remote** Summer offerings will start to be articulated and posted in early May.

** All current summer programs are likely to be ported in their current or in a modified format to still be a “go” in the remote learning context! We are figuring out how to do this, and we continue to be – honestly – really happy with how well student engagement and hands-on projects CAN work even in a distance learning format!

June, July and August: <https://www.aceraschool.org/enrichment-programs/summer-camp/>



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Frequently Asked Questions:

Question: What if my school district moves to "mandatory" participation in its distance learning approach?

Answer: You get to decide what happens for your child, and how you frame that. This is all especially true now, amid COVID.

- If APS makes school participation "mandatory" you can, as a family, decide how to handle that.
- If a family chooses to think of themselves as "dually enrolled" in both Acera School and APS that is fine -- Acera is flexible. We can reduce project and work and accountability expectations from our program in ways that fit the student so that students do not get stressed.
- Enrolling in Acera Pop Up School can "count" as enrolling your child in an independent school remote program for the rest of the school year. This means that you do not need to participate in APS program once you enroll in Acera Pop Up school.
- Alternatively, you can think of your family as "homeschooling" and that the Acera Pop Up program is one of a few different approaches and programs you are enrolling/ engaging in along with -- say -- Khan academy, dance class, virtual violin class, and another different program you may have chosen. Homeschool student's parents typically need to submit a "homeschool education plan" to the school's central office for it to "count" as school if you are "opting out" of APS program. School districts may not be enforcing that norm spring 2020.
- Additionally, in early March, the DESE voted that days of participation / attendance required to count a student as "passing" no longer applied this year, due to COVID.
- Ideally, the Acera Pop Up "whole school experience" would also include the 3:30 - 5:30 elective program; so far families are not signing up for both programs, which is fine. it is up to each family.
- Yes, if a student enrolls in Acera Pop Up School, they could let their school/ teacher know that they are enrolled in this -- if this enrollment and the schedule have conflict with public school expectations. A family does not have to do that "notification" unless they want to.

Question: Are there any negative ramifications to enrolling in Acera Pop Up School?

Aka I don't want to offend my child's teacher or principal. And I care deeply about equity and public education and am part of a community where that is truly a value we share.

- Now more than ever, educators understand if families decide to carve their own path. Always, though, educators "get" that parents do and should make decisions with the best interests of their child in mind. Professionals do not "hold it against you" if you leave a school to go elsewhere. Additionally, on the community side, I think there is a fear many of us have, as parents, that if we "pull our kids out and put them into private school" we will be perceived as traitors and that others will judge us for not staying "in" and participating to make the public schools better. However, ultimately, if your child is not thriving, it makes sense to find the right path for your child, not stay allegiant to worries of having your motivations or actions judged by others. You can send your child to private school *and* be a good, contributing community member.
- Additionally, though, these are not typical times:
 1. We are in a pandemic
 2. The Acera Pop Up School alternative is complementary to doing other more traditional types of education
 3. Kids are atrophying at home, without connections, without engaging learning experiences and projects and ideas. Educators and neighbors understand that parents are trying out all kinds of new approaches.
 4. *Turn it around.* . . . In fact, maybe it is generous and virtuous to enroll, as Acera and partnering parents share a larger vision that this could help set the stage for future "Pop Up" programs within public schools by modeling a version and approach of schooling which works for this situation, for authentic student engagement and growth. Maybe we can, together, set the stage for a better public school capacity to pivot quickly and effectively next time, if it is needed?

Our Mission: Acera is a small, non-profit program with a mission to serve and contribute, and we have invested substantial dollars, hours and ingenuity in our broad range of [AceraEI public school outreach programs](#), all of which have been free for public schools. Teachers from over 25 school districts have participated in AceraEI's programs. Pop Up school is a new program we hope to bring on-line more broadly, if needed, in partnership with public school districts, in the future. This pilot program can help us "prove" the approach and evolve/ learn from it, as well.

These are completely uncharted times. Every parent is doing their best to navigate and decide, and Acera Pop Up school is building upon a few of our different very successful models in this novel and innovative offering.