



The Massachusetts School of
Science, Creativity and Leadership

Pop Up Acera Extension School:

Remote schooling option for 4th-10th grade public school students amid COVID Crisis

Solicited by an Arlington parent group and piloted April-June 2020. Updated 7/6/20.

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 and a successful pilot program in Spring 2020, we are launching an extension school for three student cohort groups (grades 4/5, 6/7, and 8/9/10) who will engage around meaningful topics and have a school experience enabling student growth in complex thinking, writing, and initiative in ways that fit each students’ abilities and interests. Four to seven week sessions allow families flexibility to join, leave, or return to Pop Up throughout the 2020/2021 school year, depending on their public schooling requirements and family’s decision making about what’s best for their child. See sessions below:

	Fall Term			Winter Term		Spring Term		
Session Dates	September 8 - Oct 2	October 5 - Oct 30 (No School 10/12)	November 2 - Dec 18 (No School 11/25-27)	January 4 - Feb 12 (No School 1/18/21)	Feb 22 - Mar 19	March 22 - April 16	April 26 - May 21	May 24 - June 18
# of weeks	4	4	7	6	4	4	4	4

Acera School did a 10 hour “flip turn” converting its Day Program to a remote schooling format on March 12, and has since converted its Enrichment electives 3:30-5:30pm and Summer Camp to high-engagement programming despite the COVID crisis. We seek to refine and reiterate on our new model of Pop-Up School which could be adopted broadly by public schools in the future. Acera REPS (remote extension pop-up school) intends to invent an answer. Join our online schooling community next year, 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 4/15/2020, 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, 2020, 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 - a class group discussion with a mix of dialogue, direct instruction, community building, a philosophy-salon style exchange of ideas - with creative projects and independent assignments in the afternoon. This core classroom catalyzes a full day’s schedule (9am - 3pm); elective offerings are available daily (3:30 – 5:30pm). On a per-needed basis, families may request additional support for their child: writing coaching, executive functioning support, counseling, or more with their teacher or another professional in the afternoon, for an additional fee.



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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 Massachusetts 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

Sample Daily Agenda:

"Core Classroom time" with a shared student cohort group 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 adapt the session's theme, charting a path of study for the program based on student interest. Possible theme examples: *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	Community Building & Classroom Discussion on Zoom, inquiry-style learning, student sharing of ideas, pieces, projects. Includes reflection on primary source article homework from night before. Includes "teaching" across disciplines.
10:30 - 12	Individual or peer work time on writing, assignments and projects coming out of morning meeting. Teacher one-on-ones, small group support, and peer feedback in break out rooms.
12-12:45	Socialize on Zoom (optional). Hang-out to prepare lunch & eat and/or play games virtually w/ teacher pop-ins.
12:45-1:30	Exercise requirement: online martial arts/ strength / yoga/ dance class or outdoor bike / run/ hike / movement.
1:30 - 2:00	On-line math tutorial Acera curates options (e.g. Aleks), or families continue with public school option. Families chooses and pays for their own approach.



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- 2-3:00 Finalize & submit products and projects. Post by 5pm - the day's written, math, projects, and exercise products/photos/responses.
- 3-3:30 Break
- 3:30-5:30 Suggested: Enroll in high engagement Enrichment course/s.
Alternatively, student completes any public school coursework or outside clubs/sports engaged in.

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 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 5pm that afternoon. (Has at least some analytical writing, as well as a creative expression component -- art, blog, podcast, imovie, photography, etc.) As the session unfolds, some assignments will extend into multiple days.

10:30-12pm

Work time for students on their assignments: (synchronous Zoom call)

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.

***NOTE:** *The teacher may determine how the 9-12 time frame is used, to best serve students. For high school students in particular, 10:30-12pm may be used for Discussions rather than 9:00-10:30am.*

12pm-12:45pm

Socialize: (optional, Zoom call)

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 that 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, chess, other)



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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](#) 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. 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. Note:

- For students who get particularly engaged in this learning framework, they or 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.)
- NOTE: 75% of families in the Spring Pilot continued with math coursework from their sending public schools. This worked for them.

2-3pm

Work on & Post in-process and Polished Work/ projects.

Complete morning expectation. Post onto Padlet or Google Classroom (or other tech platform tbd) by 5pm.

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. We expand our enrichment course offerings in ways that fit with teachers we have AND in ways that reflect students' interests. Based upon teachers we identify, and who are available, there are a very wide array of possibilities. If we get a group of students interested in similar electives, we could look at having 2 or 3 afternoons/ week focused on the same elective multiple times/ per week.



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

Teacher	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lab Sciences Could include LabXchange by Amgen Foundation	9th – 12th Grade Gene editing, secret life of plants, microbiome.	6th-10th grade Biowearables & Inventions for Me Enroll 2x week.	9th-12th grade Lab science class Enroll 3X week	6th – 10th grade Biowearables & Inventions for Me Enroll 2x week.	9th – 12th 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

This is one sample draft of what offerings could be. Actual offerings will depend upon student/parent input and specialist teacher availability.

Possible ideas 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 |

Assessment:

- **Formative assessment** occurs as daily observations that inform teacher practices, impacting how class discussions, instruction and plans unfold each day and over time.
- For students enrolling in multiple sessions:
 - The core classroom teacher will invite parents to a **student/ parent conference** in which students and adults reflect on the process and growth over multiple sessions.
 - 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.



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- There will be a **culminating event** as part of the last week of each session. 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.

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.

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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What Families from the Pilot Program are Saying:

“Pop Up School has made a huge positive impact on my daughter's mood and general outlook. The regular schedule, structured interaction and engaging topics have helped her manage anxiety and sadness about the pandemic and lack of ‘regular life’ activities. Pop Up School has helped make our whole family's life at home more pleasant.”

“She is very excited to learn new topics and discussions are engaging & educational.”

“More enthusiastic about learning and school. More easily follows a schedule for the day. More engaged about school and other academic activities. Argues less about expectations. More willing to defer playing video games and limit it to certain times of the day.”

“My child has more energy and enthusiasm for life. The quarantine hit her hard emotionally, but having a routine, a community, a live, if remote, teacher have made her happier and less mired in anxiety.”

“Glad he's on some kind of morning schedule.”

“He definitely seems happier and less anxious, it is something for him to organize himself around.”

“Our daughter has a renewed sense of purpose and direction since enrolling with the Acera school. Before enrolling, she spent a lot of time reading which she enjoyed, but we didn't see a spark in her; since being part of this program she has clear targets and intellectual challenges she is grappling with.”

Program Costs & Important Dates

Core Classroom Experience Monday-Friday, 9am-3pm	(\$450 per week) Session Costs:
September 8 - October 2, 2020*	\$1800
October 5 - October 30, 2020*	\$1800
November 2 - December 18, 2020 (7 week)	\$3150
January 4 - February 12, 2021 (6 week)	\$2700
February 22 - March 19, 2021*	\$1800
March 22 - April 16, 2021*	\$1800
April 26 - May 21, 2021*	\$1800
May 24 - June 18, 2021*	\$1800

*most sessions are 4 weeks long

Elective 3:30-5:30pm courses:

Sign up through Acera Enrichment website:

<https://www.aceraschool.org/enrichment-programs/after-school-programs/>

Email enrichment@aceraschool.org with questions



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Important Dates:

- 9/7 No School
- 10/12 No School
- 11/11 No School
- 11/25-11/27 No School (Thanksgiving)
- 12/21-1/1/2021 No School (Winter Break)
- 1/18/21 No School
- 2/15-2/19/21 No School (February Break)
- 4/19-4/23/21 No School (April Break)
- 5/31/21 No School

Program Enrollment & Policies

Changes and Cancellations

Pop Up is designed to offer flexible options to families, to sign on for month long “trials,” multiple months, or commit to a full year of schooling. As we are hiring class teachers, committing professional development resources and support staff to launch this program, are **not able to provide refunds**.

However, payment for one session may be applied to another session (given space available in the class). Contact popup@aceraschool.org if you require a change to your enrollment session. Please contact us as soon as a change is known, as class size is capped.

Enrollment is rolling, until a class is filled. Updates will be available on the enrollment form and website.

If our minimum enrollment is not reached for a class, we will consider new class groupings. As a last resort, we reserve the right to cancel and refund your money in full for that session.

Add-ons

The weekly price is inclusive of the “core classroom experience” as outlined. For students requiring additional support, we will brainstorm and offer additional services. Please inquire at popup@aceraschool.org with questions about your unique child and concerns.

Example services for the afternoon:

- Check-ins for Executive Functioning Support (weekly or daily)
- Progress monitoring and share out between parent and core teachers (weekly)
- Writing support - additional writing assignments or extensive feedback/coaching (weekly)
- Counseling - support for students with social emotional needs (weekly)

Removal from Pop Up

If a student is not able to participate in a safe and productive way, or if the teacher feels that the student is not engaging at a level appropriate for the program, the teacher may ask that the student not return to the program. Refunds will be provided for students removed from the program due to behavioral issues. Decisions about participation are made at the discretion of the child’s teacher and Program Manager (Alexis Daniels).



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Financial Aid

Unfortunately we are not able to offer Financial Aid at this time.

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.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Should my family stay enrolled in public school? Is Acera a “for credit” program?
 - a. We leave this choice up to each family. For some, it is important that the child remain connected to the school/friends, even if minimally engaged in the educational materials. For others, Pop Up School - plus supplemental programs - create a full school experience.
 - b. If your school district makes school participation "mandatory," you can, as a family, decide how to handle that.
 - c. If a family chooses to think of themselves as "dually enrolled" in both Acera School and your public school 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.
 - d. 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 your public school program once you enroll in Acera Pop Up school.
 - e. 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 your district’s program. School districts may not be enforcing that norm 2020/2021 school year.
 - f. 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. (This was our suggestion Spring 2020; your school may request further information in 2020-2021 school year.)
2. What can I do to help, as a parent?
 - a. **Parent Roles:**
Advocate: 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
3. Can Acera alums participate?
 - a. While Acera alumni are welcome to return for Enrichment programs and Pop Up, we do want to point out differences between the Core Day and Pop Up experience. It is important that alumni adjust their expectations, as they are not the same experience! In Pop Up, you primarily work with 1 teacher; groups will shift every 4-7 weeks; program components such as Electives and in-depth IMPp work is not offered at this time. If you are wondering about goodness of fit, attend an info session or contact popup@aceraschool.org.