

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Educational Values and Interests Survey Presentation
MINUTES (approved 2/4/10)**

**Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School**

**January 28 2010
7:30 pm**

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith
McManus, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot

Members Absent: Jonathan Chinitz

Others: Marie Altieri, Craig Hardimon, Susan Horn, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Beth Petr,
Andrew Shen, Tess Summers

The meeting was called to order at 7:36 pm by Xuan Kong and Sharon McManus.

PRESENTATION

Director of Pupil Services, Liza Huber, began the presentation and stated that as with most effective Acton and Acton-Boxborough initiatives, this has been a grass roots effort. From a historical perspective, staff and faculty were noticing some shifts in trends and patterns observed across settings – potential points of disagreement, changes in expectation, and/or competing goals. District staff thought it would be proactive to identify the current values and goals of the community and to have our educators participate in the process as well.

From a summer leadership institute in June 2008, a study group was formed to begin talking about some demographic shifts in our communities, competing values, and the effect it's had on our schools. The original survey hypothesis considered that people who have had a different cultural experience may bring a new experience, and may even have a different educational value system. As this process has evolved, the study group has also begun to consider other variables.

The 90-question survey resulted in a 50% response rate from faculty and staff and more than 1300 responses from parents and guardians. While the aggregate data suggests that there are more common, than disparate values, it is important to understand the subtleties of the data. By disaggregating the data into three categories: race and ethnicity, educational background, and years in Acton, divergent thinking becomes more evident. These differing goals and perspectives may influence how our schools are considered going forward and should be discussed.

Survey materials are posted on the homepage of the school website (<http://ab.mec.edu>). Study group members include: Liza Huber, Craig Hardimon, Andrew Shen, Stephen Hitzrot, James Marcotte, Kellie Carter, Diane Telicki, Marie Altieri, Ed Kaufman, Christine Price, Matthew Kidder, Carol Huebner, and Mary Emmons.

R.J. Grey Junior High Principal Craig Hardimon presented the disaggregate data and Assistant Principal Andrew Shen shared respondents' comments and how they were coded. Respondents were not asked to prioritize, just whether they thought something was valuable or not. Talking is the only way to promote understanding of these differences in values and perceptions and by doing so, boundaries may be broken down. The study group recommends 6-month updates to be shared with the School Committee.

Questions from the School Committee

Everyone was very thankful for the tremendous amount of work done to gather this information.

John Petersen said, “The message we as parents should be giving our kids, is that we need you to work hard to be the best YOU that YOU can be. Don’t agonize over what you are NOT. There’s a big educational piece that the frame of reference needs to be proper, so they can achieve success. It is critically important that we keep the reference point so that it will always be meaningful for everyone.”

Bruce Sabot reflected on the issue of the need to possibly compare and contrast our educational achievement and goals to our international peers.

Brigid Bieber complimented the work of the study group and the amount of time put in by all study group members given their full time jobs within the district. She commented that the presentation highlighted our educational challenges; educating a group of students with diverse family backgrounds, defining success, and doing it on a shoe string. The survey results show how much our community values trying to look at issues and make ourselves better.

Mike Coppolino suggested that students and post-graduates be solicited for their opinions as a next step and their possible availability to study and respond to the data. He asked if someone should contact a group at UMass Amherst or the Dept of Education to see if they could give an objective view of what the data says. Despite positive feedback from the community, Mike feels a sense of urgency around the issues. He would like to see the data framed with an endpoint to accomplish something and would like to bring the work to a conclusion.

Terry Lindgren and Maria Neyland both advocated strongly for addressing the stress and wellness issues identified in the survey results.

Dr. Mills read an email sent from Jonathan Chinitz who was out of town. Jonathan’s email asked if the data shows enough of a “shift” to merit changes in the way our schools are run, or if the constituencies are being served well enough to leave things as they are.

Xuan Kong agrees with Mike about the urgency. The District Smart Goal indicated completion of the action plan in 60 days by the end of March.

Liza Huber noted that although the project began more than 18 months ago, the data portals closed more recently on October 1st, 2009.

Brigid Bieber, Terry Lindgren, and Sharon McManus focused their comments on the need to continue to analyze the data, and providing the study group time to share data results with faculty and determine priority themes going forward.

Public Participation

Parent Alice Cogan said that it is very important to have formal review of the data and that results be made publicly available. She said there are resources available that could help interpret the results.

Another parent stated that it is the goal of education to provide a wide range of opportunities for each student’s interests and abilities. He asked whose decision is it to decide what the schools do, the School Committee, or the parents who pay the taxes that elect the School Committee members.

A parent emphasized the importance of children finding their niche and being confident with who they are. He questioned the value of comparing what we are doing with other communities.

Conclusion

Sharon McManus suggested that the study group come back in May with some recommendations for short term things that can be done, some specific data points to be addressed, with a particular emphasis to address stress and related wellness perspectives found within our schools and community.

Mike Coppolino asked for the data to be made available in the library and schools. He also asked for some students, more teachers, parents and volunteers to be included to broaden study group membership. He wants to hear something back sooner – within a couple of months, including some direction of how the group is going to proceed.

Recognizing the interest in stress and wellness issues, Liza Huber asked for guidance from the School Committee on their additional areas of interest and priorities. The stress and wellness data point is easy to pull out and work on more intensively, but there are other data points to consider as well. The study group did articulate practical next steps that include asking students for their input through a third survey. Liza stated that the staff and faculty need more time to learn about the data and join the process going forward.

Xuan Kong was concerned about letting the March 2010 goal deadline pass without action, and spoke about accountability. He asked the Study Group to bring back their recommendations by March. John Petersen wants a few items identified that could be measured on an ongoing basis.

Brigid Bieber stated that the practical next steps identified in the Executive Summary were appropriate and that 6-month updates were reasonable. She suggested that the study group identify a couple of themes to be identified over the next couple of months. Maria Neyland agreed with this stated perspective.

Terry Lindgren volunteered to represent the School Committee and join the district's study group.

At 9:26 pm, the Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr