

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES (approved 12/3/09)

Room 184 West (Math/Science Lecture Hall)
AB Regional High School

November 5, 2009
7:30 pm

SC Attendees: Brigid Bieber, Mike Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Sharon Smith McManus, Maria Neyland, John Petersen
Absent: Jonathan Chinitz, Terry Lindgren, Bruce Sabot
Other Attendees: Marie Altieri, Susan Horn, Steve Mills, Beth Petr, Tess Summers, Members of the public

Sharon Smith McManus called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #10-008 in the amount of \$1,377,781.60, Warrant #10-009 in the amount of \$1,641,681.95, and Warrant #10-010 in the amount of \$1,651,164.19 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for approval.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of 10-1-09 will be voted on at the next meeting (12/3/09) because they were in the addendum.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. ALG Report
John Petersen is concerned about the high level of reserves being used in the ALG proposed plan. He wants to save the reserves at 5% or greater due to concern about state aid and the inability to refresh the reserves in the future. With three members absent, it was decided to postpone this discussion.
2. BLF Report
BLF met on October 6, 2009 and looked over the 2011 budget guidelines. Current financial model shows a \$507,000 deficit for FY11 but it shows a 6% increase in the assessment which Tess Summers thinks is unlikely. Sharing of some central office positions is being considered. Next meeting is Dec 8 at 7:30 in Boxborough Library.
3. Negotiations Subcommittee Report
The Subcommittee has been meeting weekly for the past 5 or 6 weeks in executive session on Wednesday mornings. The first meeting with representatives from the teachers' union was on 10/28/09.
4. FY'10 Budget Update
 - *Governor Patrick's 9C Budget Cuts/MMA Action Alert 10/29/09*

The budget update was described as “aggravatingly vague” due to unclear details about the Governor’s 9C cuts. A 1.5% cut in circuit breaker equals about \$48,000 for both the local and regional systems. Regional Transportation is the other cut. All regional systems are getting hit significantly now. Originally, we were going to be reimbursed at 90% for Regional Transportation. We are now at 29% of our expenses.

5. FY’11 Budget

The December 3rd School Committee meeting will be the first presentation of the proposed FY11 budget. The November 18th ALG meeting request is for Dr. Mills to prepare budgets using 3% expense increases and 10% cuts in state aid. We still have \$470,000 stimulus money left for next year. Dr. Mills thanked Tess Summers, Marie Altieri and everyone for their hard work. With a \$3 million cut, there will be layoffs. Dr. Mills is meeting with department heads to discuss cuts that could be considered.

John Petersen requested another visit from Community Education Director, Erin Bettez, to talk about curriculum as well as financials in the Spring. Sharon McManus asked for a review of how Community Education money can be spent as part of the budget discussion.

6. Endorsing Corporate Sponsorships

There are two ways to manage the budget – cut expenses or generate revenue. Nothing can be taken for granted any more regarding the budget. New ideas must be considered. Dr. Mills has spoken with Erin Bettez to see how the Community Education Program might generate additional revenue. He has also talked to Athletic Director, Steve Desy about corporate sponsors for some of his programs. In Worcester Dr. Mills was very successful in starting a foundation to pick up some of the expenses for athletics and performing arts. He knows that we are already starting to do some of this (ABSASF, EDFAAB), but he and Steve (Desy) would like to eliminate the entire \$150,000 appropriated athletic budget using corporate sponsors. This budget is for expenses like referees and timekeepers. Selling space on school fencing every season is a possibility. Care would be taken that this is handled appropriately. MIAA rules must be confirmed. Uniforms would not have corporate names on them. Dr. Mills asked if the School Committee would like him to continue pursuing this revenue generating option. If it is very successful, student athletic fees may even be decreased.

Committee members enthusiastically directed Dr. Mills to continue investigating corporate sponsorship funding. Brigid Bieber said, “This is exactly what we need. We are in difficult times and need to think outside the box. We are already doing this, we just need to do it bigger. This is an easy YES.”

Questions to be considered:

1. How would the money flow into the school system?
2. Would School Committee be asked for a blanket approval, or would they vote on each individual sponsorship?

3. How does this relate to ABSAF and other organizations' activities? Dr. Mills met with ABSAF President Nick Finamore and agrees that they don't want to interfere with what's being done. This new effort would focus on larger donations from corporations, not individuals.
4. What kind of policy would there be to accept the monies?
5. Should advertising on our school buses be revisited?

A corporate sponsorship update will be given at the 12/3/09 School Committee meeting, particularly since Steve Desy will be outlining the athletics budget.

8. Anti-Bullying Task Force Update

The Group met in October with most elementary principals, assistant principals and counselors from the Junior High and High School attending. This is a large diverse group. Subcommittees with chairs have been set up. Mike Coppolino felt that more parents/guardians should be on the Task Force. There are only two or three.

9. SPED PAC Update

SPED PAC is interested in the Anti-Bullying Task Force's next steps. They are concerned about the Junior High and Conant MCAS results.

10. Interschool Council Update

Dr. Mills met with his Interschool Council on 11/2/09. Large classes and bullying were the top concerns. The Elementary Principals are all interested in discussing social competency programs – which is connected to the bullying issue.

11. Blue Ribbon School Award

Dr. Mills displayed the plaque and banner that we just received. Dr. Callen went to Washington DC and accepted it with Jerry McDonald, ABRHS teacher. U.S. Education Secretary, Arne Duncan was the speaker. The award is given to the K-12 school system because they recognize that it takes K – 12 to educate the child. Dr. Mills stated, "I am so honored to be the Superintendent of a school that received this very prestigious award."

NEW BUSINESS

1. School Calendar, 2010-11

It was moved, seconded and

VOTED: To approve the administration's recommendation to adopt the 2010-11 school calendar as presented. (VOTE: 5 yes, 1 no [Neyland])

There is only one religious holiday during a school week in 2010-2011 because one of the Jewish holidays falls on a Saturday and Good Friday is during vacation week. Maria Neyland voted no because it still includes religious holidays. She stated, "We live in such a diverse community that this is not right." It was strongly agreed that the Committee would revisit the issue of holidays in the school calendar later this year.

2. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands
It was moved, seconded and
VOTED: To approve the ABRHS Trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, July 2011 (VOTE: 4 yes, 2 no [Coppolino, Kong])

Mike Coppolino was stunned at the cost of this trip (\$6,395. per student). He asked, "Is it necessary for the school to sponsor this? It's clearly beyond the reach of some of our students." Dr. Callen said that although it is technically not a school trip, we approved it in the past in order to cover the teachers involved, and put them at less risk. Brigid Bieber appreciated Mike's point but said that there is significant fundraising done by the students as a team. Any opportunity to travel is a life changing event and some kids may never have an opportunity to do this otherwise. She fully supports it.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Items on the consent calendar were all voted individually per members' requests.

3. Recommendation to Approve Acton-Boxborough Regional School District's 2009-10 Tuition Rate - **VOTE**

This is the non-resident tuition rate, although we currently have no non-resident students. Xuan Kong asked if this is really the total cost to educate these students. Tess Summers said that it is not because items like grant money are not included. Xuan felt that these are part of our costs and need to be figured correctly. He requested that the Central Office redo the calculations. John Petersen agreed. Tess said that debt service is included in this number but grants are not. Sometimes we don't know grants at this time. It was agreed that the vote would be taken at next month's meeting.

4. Recommendation to Approve 2009-10 SPED Program Tuition Rates – **VOTE**

Liza Huber requested that the SPED tuition rate vote be deferred to next month because she has more information to provide prior to voting. (She was not in attendance.) She also asked that questions be addressed to her directly prior to the meeting. John Petersen said that Committee members need to understand the constraints, if they exist, on how to set the rates.

5. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Girls Ice Hockey Team Trip to Falmouth, MA
It was moved, seconded and
VOTED: To approve the ABRHS Girls Ice Hockey Team Trip to Falmouth, MA, December 4-5, 2009 (VOTE: 5 yes, 1 no [Kong])

Xuan Kong voted no because the form was improperly filled out. He said, "If this were a homework assignment for a student, the teacher would have asked the student to do a better job in order to get a passing grade."

6. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Girls Basketball Team Trip to Freeport, ME

It was moved, seconded and

VOTED: To approve the ABRHS Girls Basketball Team Trip to Freeport, ME, December 5, 2009 (VOTE: 5 yes, 1 no [Kong])

7. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Spanish Language Trip to NYC

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the ABRHS Spanish Language Trip to NYC, December 4, 2009

8. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Basketball Team Trip to Cape Cod

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the ABRHS Basketball Team Trip to Cape Cod, December 11-12, 2009

9. Recommendation to Approve RJGJHS Ski Trip to Waterville Valley, NH

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the RJGJHS Ski Trip to Waterville Valley, NH, January 23, 2010

10. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Friends of the Acton Libraries

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$6,500 to the regional school libraries - \$4K to ABRHS, \$2.5K to RJGrey.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

1. Measuring Growth in Student Performance in MCAS

Assistant Superintendent Susan Horn presented a new MCAS measurement that will be very meaningful to staff and students who don't typically succeed in MCAS. This model also works for kids who are high achieving. If they start 6th grade reading at 7th grade level, they should end the year at the 8th grade level. This measurement will show whether that has happened or not.

We have not looked at MCAS in terms of growth in the past. The way MCAS has been, MCAS scores cannot be compared year to year for accountability. Is there growth/value added for kids who are succeeding on the test? Growth measures change in an individual student's performance over time. Performance = achievement + growth.

Typical Student Growth Percentile should be 40 – 60% for a year. Data can be broken down by gender and all kinds of ways. This adds another layer of answers to "Are we improving?". Each student is compared to other students who scored like they did and how they did the next year. This is very new. You want to be a high achieving district with high growth. We are in the growing and learning business so this growth model really is valuable.

The Principals are talking about how to share this with the staff. Liza Huber is involved. School staff must partner with the parent community to explain it. Different schools and special needs students will show different growth and staff will ask “What can we do differently to address this?” It will be important to explain this and help people understand how to use the scores constructively. Next year all families will receive this new data with their child’s MCAS reports.

2. Report of Professional Development Day, 11/3/09

All teachers in the state are required to participate in professional development. 15 different sessions were offered to staff on 11/3. Sue Horn thanked all involved.

3. Westford Comparables – Meeting on 10/20/09

Steve Mills, Tess Summers, and Marie Altieri had a very enlightening meeting with the Westford Schools’ Superintendent. Our schools are very similar in many ways.

Mike Coppolino asked, “What, if anything, have we learned about efficiencies that Westford might have showed us? What best practices can we learn from? How does Westford report their circuit breaker money? They seem to spend more on early education and save more in older grades.”

Nancy Sherburne and Bill Guthlein (SPED PAC) distributed their analysis of the comparison numbers. Acton has half again as many sped students as Westford. This affects how much we spend per student so it’s not surprising that we spend more money. The difference in spending is in the Out of District tuition. We should look at comparable spending over time of districts, not just one year. They want to support the district in these efforts of finding efficiencies, and encourage the district to pursue the path of kids staying in-district. Nancy Sherburne was thanked for her response.

Catherine Suess asked if we meet with other districts on occasion, because it is so valuable to share best practices. The Committee said that this is done as much as possible.

4. Records Request from a Citizen

- 10/27/09 Requests from Allen Nitschelm #AN001 – AN008

Sharon McManus distributed a draft response to Mr. Nitschelm’s 10/27/09 requests, and a detailed accounting of the time and effort spent on his requests over the past year.

Mike Coppolino said, “The big question is, why is Allen asking for all of this? Is it a lack of trust?” Steve Mills met with Mr. Nitschelm and thinks it is a trust issue. Much time has been spent creating spreadsheets and reports from W2s, as requested. Reports from the MUNIS system have been given to him but they had to be exported to excel because they included employees’ social security numbers on them. The more information that is provided, the more Mr. Nitschelm asks for.

John Petersen said that the report from Bill and Nancy is a perfect example of how we like to work with the community. Allen's response is the opposite. There needs to be a purpose to the questions that seems lacking here. He would like the Committee to express that they do not see that what he is doing is helpful or purposeful.

Maria Neyland thinks the requests border on harassment. She said, "The staff has work to do. This is also taking away from the students' time. What is the purpose of these requests?"

Brigid Bieber agrees completely. As public officials the Committee has the responsibility to provide information. "That's what is frustrating. It seems like this is wearing us down. Should we ask counsel about how to resolve this?"

Parent Heather Harer spoke from the audience, "As a citizen it's time for the community to speak up about one citizen who is using so much of the office and legal staff's time. It's been echoed all night how to work more efficiently and effectively to teach and work with the kids. It's going to cost us but you should talk to legal counsel."

The Committee asked the Administration to check with legal counsel.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 10:11 pm, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was polled and voted unanimously to go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) according to Chapter 39 Section 23A Paragraph 3, "To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the governmental body."

At 10:42 pm, the Committee was polled and voted to go out of Joint Executive Session.

At 10:43 pm the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: December 3 - 7:30 pm, at RJ Grey JH Library

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr