

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES (approved 12/17/09)

Library
McCarthy-Towne School/Parker Damon Building

November 19, 2009
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith
McManus, John Petersen
Absent: Jonathan Chinitz
Others : Susan Horn, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Beth Petr, Tess Summers,

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm by Xuan Kong.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of October 15, 2009 were unanimously approved as written.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201010 dated 11/17/09 in the amount of \$214,617.69 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for approval.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Superintendent Steve Mills read a statement regarding Administrators' compensation in response to an article circulated by an Acton citizen. (See addendum) Xuan Kong said that the School Committee fully supports his leadership, as well as that of Bill Ryan. He said that it is a moral and legal obligation to honor our employees' contracts.

EDUCATION REPORT - McCarthy-Towne School - *Principal David Krane*

David talked about change and how children handle transitions and social skills/responsibilities. David is only the third principal in the 40 year history of the McCarthy-Towne School and the only outsider. He brings change just by being there. He intends to honor the value system that has been so important to this school. Giving students the tools and responsibilities to handle social problems is a priority. The Responsive Classroom is designed to be part of the whole day. One of the most compelling pieces is the language that it gives students to resolve conflicts. Buses can be one of the most difficult places to deal with because it is unstructured time without a lot of adult supervision. Bullying will always be an issue, but we need to teach students not to be a bystander while it is happening. They need to be part of the solution.

Liza Huber shared an Anti-Bullying Task Force handout. She feels we are ahead of the curve when it comes to addressing the issue. Officer Keith Campbell has worked with 6th graders and there is a cyber-bullying unit of the DARE program now. The schools work to build a partnership regarding the social curriculum language between students and parents/guardians. Cyber bullying peaks in 5th and 6th grade. Although much of it happens outside of school, it disrupts the school day and the school ends up having to manage it. This is a major challenge for the subcommittee. It was asked how students'

cultural backgrounds play into this behavior. The Principals said that it is seen across the board – girls and boys, young and old, quiet and loud children.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. ALG Report/Acton Finance Committee Report

Mary Ann Ashton and Steve Noone gave a presentation from the Acton Finance Committee Cost Reduction Subcommittee. Much public input was involved. The next step is to turn the list of recommendations into implementations. The subcommittee will complete work by mid January. Dr. Mills thanked them for a great piece of work and said that they look forward to working together on it. He appreciated that they realize that most of these are long term items. Jonathan Chinitz and Xuan Kong agreed to join this new subcommittee. A meeting will be held with the Board of Selectmen on 11/30/09.

Sharon McManus reported on the FinCom. JD Head did a solar panel presentation for the Committee. They want the School Committee to be sure to write the agreement carefully to protect ourselves financially if the company has trouble. At the 11/10/09 meeting, it was unanimously agreed that the FinCom should present a POV document. This should include statements about reserves and taxes. The next FinCom meetings are 11/17, 12/8 and 12/22.

Sharon McManus reported on ALG. On 10/21, the consensus of ALG was that discussions on FY11 should move away from revenue because there was so much uncertainty around it. Focus should be on the expense side. Level service and 3% increase budgets should be looked at, as well as a 0% increase scenario.

ALG met again on 11/19. There are 3 columns now for FY 10 on the ALG Model spreadsheet. The DOR changes have had an impact on us. FY 11,12,13 columns do not reflect the new changes. Additional 9C cuts for this year are expected. A Level Service budget clearly isn't going to happen this year. Consensus of the ALG was for the boards to develop a 3% budget, document the impact and create a list of cuts that would be needed for a 0% budget increase. ALG also wanted the SC and BOS to ask for input on use of reserves. ALG will be talking about meals tax, and whether it should be proposed at Town Meeting at their next meeting on 12/16.

Representative Cory Atkins had her monthly meeting and Terry Lindgren reported that she asked them to consider a 15% cut in state aid for next year. He said that the experts are saying it will not be a \$600,000 but a billion dollar problem.

Terry Lindgren wants ALG to have a strong statement from the School Committee regarding their view of reserve use.

Catherine Seuss, a McCarthy-Towne teacher and local parent requested that the Committee continue to speak respectfully about the teachers and staff and remind others as well. She said, "We have a highly motivated group of teachers

in Acton. We are one of the most hardworking faculty in the country.” She expressed concern as private citizens come together to discuss the budget cuts and how the school staff may be referred to. The Committee assured her that they would emphasize the importance of respectful conversations and appreciating our valuable staff.

2. BOS Update

The BOS will not be doing a level service budget. They will be doing a cutting budget and looking at what to protect.

3. FY'10 and '11 Budget Update

Prevailing wisdom is that the governor will have more cuts. He also wanted to avoid communities going to special town meetings in the fall so he waited. Dr. Mills said that he will be prepared to make cuts if necessary in January. He would never bring any budget information to any other board before the School Committee sees it. He understands that his charge is to bring in a budget that resolves 70% of the \$2.2 million problem. He will present this proposal at the Regional SC meeting on 12/3 without professional staff layoffs. There would be paraprofessional layoffs. The other charge would be a 3% cut budget. Broader cuts will be required for this plan. It would involve professional cuts in all of the schools and Central Office.

4. Health Trust Report

The HIT meets tomorrow at 8 AM. Latest cash flow says we are negative about \$300,000 which means rates were probably 1% too low. This could be better or worse by year end. Marie used 10% and the Town used 8.5%. Must have the same assumptions in the town/school budgets.

5. Recommendation to Approve FY'10 Integrated Preschool Tuition Rate

It was decided not to vote on this rate this year because we do not have openings and are completely full. Liza Huber suggested that the Committee stop bringing this rate to a vote because it has not been used for a number of years. Xuan asked Liza to provide the info to the Committee as a case study for them to learn, while there is no consequence.

NEW BUSINESS

1. State Petition to Relieve Unfunded Mandates per Representative Corey Atkins – list of prioritized mandates

Representative Cory Atkins is gathering a list of unfunded mandates that could be eliminated by November 30. BOS chair Paulina Knibbe offered to write the letter, ideally with 4 or 5 items on the list. Many examples were given, such as: curriculum frameworks, home schooling, rock wall educators that need to be licensed, SIMMS, building codes, CORI forms, new ethics training, etc. Rep.

Atkins wants to hear about things that she can control. Some committee members want to send our entire list. Xuan Kong will get back to Paulina.

2. **Recommendation to Approve Acton Public Schools' Tuition Rate for 2009-10**

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: to approve Acton Public Schools' non-resident Tuition Rate of \$11,290 per pupil for 2009-10.

3. **Recommendation to Approve 2010-2011 School Calendar**

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: to approve the 2010-2011 School Calendar

It was agreed that a thorough discussion of holidays and vacations would take place next Fall regarding the school calendar.

4. **Recommendation to Accept Gifts from the Friends of the Acton Libraries**

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: to accept the gifts from the Friends of the Acton Libraries with gratitude.

5. **Moving Forward with Capital Projects**

Plans are being made to move forward with a new roof at Douglas next summer. Big projects remaining include: Admin building roof, and the Gates and Conant roofs. None of them are dire but they are outside of their useful life now. Douglas has a bid with the SBA to be reimbursed in the future.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE

These two items were postponed until the next meeting due to time:

1. School Committee Liaison for each Elementary School
2. Long-range planning question from BOS member

At 10:44 pm, the Acton Public School Committee was polled and voted unanimously to go into Executive Session 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."

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 11:09 pm.

NEXT MEETING - December 17, 7:30 pm at R.J. Grey Junior High School

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr
Secretary