

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes (approved 3/15/12)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High

February 16, 2012
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, John Petersen
Members Absent: Dennis Bruce
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton Public School Committee meeting was called to order by Chairperson Michael Coppolino at 7:07 p.m.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201216 dated 2/7/12 in the amount of \$182,125.62 was signed by the Chairperson and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of January 19, 2012 were approved as amended. Kim McOsker abstained from voting because she was not at the meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group

Marie Altieri reported that the work of this group is now complete. All eight Acton Municipal and School Bargaining Units have ratified the Health Insurance Plan Design and Cost Sharing Changes, with budgetary savings across all three budgets for FY13 estimated to be \$766,000. John Petersen thanked the Working Group for their very significant efforts and results. Marie and Kim McOsker (School Committee rep to the Working Group) thanked all who served on the Committee. Mike Coppolino joined in thanking all involved, including John Petersen who was instrumental in leading the School Committee's initial effort several months ago.

Due to the time, the Committee took 6.3.3 APS FY13 Budget out of order, and then returned to 6.2.

6.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report

John Petersen reported that due to the amount of late breaking information, the Trust did not set rates at their meeting on February 16th. They expect to do so at their next meeting on February 24. He said they are grateful to be setting only one rate now for the first time. The Trustees are also looking at how the fund balance is maintained.

APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE OPEN BUDGET HEARING

Members were asked to bring their 1/28/12 Budget Binder, posted online at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>.

6.3 FY'13 Budget

6.3.1 ALG Report

John Petersen reported on the ALG meetings of 1/30/12 and 2/16/12. A detailed discussion took place at tonight's ALG meeting regarding Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). The \$500,000 that the Acton Finance Committee wants set aside is the sum of the municipal, Acton

Public School District and Regional School District obligations. There will be 2 separate trust funds, one for the town (includes the APSD) and one for the Regional School District. When asked how it should be decided how much money to put in each account, John said it should be allocated based on the ratio of actuarial liabilities. Because the region is 44% and the town is 56% of the liability, this translates to \$266,000 for the region and \$244,000 for town and local schools.

Discussion also included FY14 and FY15 and how to project those years. The ALG spreadsheet and FinCom's Long Range Plan are not in agreement so further discussion will take place.

6.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report

Xuan Kong reported on the meetings of 2/7/12 and 2/16/12. Discussion focused on OPEB and future projections, as summarized in the ALG report.

6.3.3 APS FY'13 Budget Discussion and **VOTE**

Dr. Mills began the FY'13 budget discussion by introducing Liza Huber and Carol Huebner to answer questions about early childhood programming including the APS preschool.

6.3.3.4 Early Childhood Programming

Liza explained that if a child is found eligible for special education services, they are required to start right away, and in the least restrictive environment. This requires a lot of planning prior to a child entering a program. Identifying children and their needs early is essential. This is why an additional preschool class is being requested for FY13. The Committee discussed state mandates. Carol said that although the mandate is one teacher and one assistant in a classroom, we often have one teacher and 2 assistants. One reason is because our ratio of special education students to typical students in some of our preschool classes is higher than we would like at this time. When asked if a full day preschool program is mandated, Liza responded that the law says a program must be designed to include the services that the child needs. If a full day is required to provide the services, then the district is mandated to offer it. The team makes these decisions.

The district is seeing more children with more intensive needs, as trends predict. The CASE Collaborative is also providing for more intense needs for children than in the past, now that more districts have their own integrated classrooms. If more preschoolers arrive next fall than anticipated, Liza and her team will, "realign, reallocate and review" whatever comes up, as they have done in the past. She expressed confidence in her staff. Xuan Kong commented that while the staff is using their best judgment for the benefit of those students that require special education services, not all of it is mandated by law. He noted that it is difficult to have this conversation if there are tradeoffs that can be made, emphasizing that as a School Committee member, he is responsible for the 30 students in the preschool as well as the 5000 other students.

Steve Mills reminded the Committee that all recommendations come through him, as Superintendent. While the special education budget should receive the same scrutiny as all budgets, he has vetted this and is recommending it. He has great confidence in Carol and her team and is a firm believer in early intervention for kids. The Committee discussed evidence that early intervention is valuable.

A member asked if the preschool is its own separate budget line item. Steve said it is not. Marie Altieri stated that staffing for all the schools is in the personnel budget. Liza will check what the total budget for the preschool is for FY12. John Petersen said that the spirit of some of the questions being asked is to make sure the district is using whatever tools are available to measure if what is being done is working.

Given that a section is now being added to the preschool due to a spike in enrollment, Dr. Mills was asked what criteria would be used for eliminating a section of the preschool, if in the future, early intervention or projections showed a drop in enrollment. He responded

that Carol Huebner and her team would make a recommendation based on the numbers and it would be considered by Liza and then by the Superintendent. When pushed for a number that would be a cut off for a decision like this, the point was made that due to the complexity and variety of needs that exist for these disabled students, a fixed number would not be reasonable.

Nancy Sherburne spoke from the audience. She stated that although two assistants in a classroom may be above the state mandate, if the assistants were not in that group, more of the students may need a 1:1 or 1:2 assistant and that would be much more expensive. Regarding the mandate that says to qualify as an integrated program, a majority or greater of the students in the integrated preschool classrooms should be regular education students, the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is trying to help. Nancy stated that the level service budget is a \$120,000 reduction for special education students. She said that she is receiving more calls than ever from special education families - the most in the six years that she has served as SPED PAC chairperson.

6.3.3.1 Douglas Special Education Program

Dr. Mills said that this proposal will not be included for FY13 due to higher priorities.

6.3.3.2 Art/Music/Physical Education Specialists

Deborah Bookis presented on the quantity and quality of instruction that would result from this proposal. John Petersen thanked her for a great response to the questions raised on Budget Saturday. Xuan Kong stated that he agreed with John about the value of adding this staff, and that ultimately merit of any investment budget should be based on how it impacts the students' education.

6.3.3.3 Classroom Assistants

Steve Mills reported great progress in his meetings with the principals and PTO co-chairs regarding assistants and the Before and After School Programs Review. He plans to propose recommendations at the March 16th APS School Committee meeting. He apologized for being unclear at an earlier meeting on this topic because he did not fully understand the complexities that exist among the programs and schools.

Dr. Mills is recommending funding of \$108,000 for assistants again for next year to help relieve some of the fundraising pressure on the PTOs.

John Petersen stated that looking at the aggregated number, the district will spend \$900,000 on assistants, 4% of the total budget. He asked for the School Committee next year to look at this model and see how effective it really is. Dr. Mills agreed that this is important. Paul Murphy asked if any of the policies should be reviewed. Dr. Mills agreed that they should be.

6.3.3.5 FY'13 Budget Review

Don Aicardi reported that 3 major forces were still in play: Review of investment budget requests, Health Insurance Design Savings and EdJobs Grant Utilization. Final rates will be set hopefully by next Friday, then he will make revisions. The proposed special education position at Douglas is included, but will probably be taken out.

Although a final vote is expected to be taken in 2 weeks, the Superintendent asked that the Committee vote to affirm the proposed budget so the Administration can move forward.

John Petersen moved that the APS School Committee approve the FY13 budget of \$27,210,233 as proposed. The motion was seconded.

Xuan Kong asked who has the authority to set the tuition for the Integrated Preschool. Dr. Mills will confirm this. He stated that \$188,000 of this program's tuition is in the revolving preschool account. Xuan asked if a history and projection for this was available. Marie Altieri said that an additional \$40,000 of staff is being charged to the Preschool revolving account. She will send this information to the School Committee. Xuan asked if this could be separated out for FY14 so the costs are clear. Dr. Mills said that Liza will report on how this tuition is calculated. John Petersen expressed concern that the revolving account has nothing to do with special education, and that it is a question of how the district matches expenses to revenue. He asked that every revolving account be subject to consistent practice. Mike Coppolino agreed strongly saying that a change must be made to this accounting practice. He emphasized that the public does not understand the nuances of Pre-Kindergarten expenses, as well as expenses for special education students up to age 22. He suggested that it would be helpful to segment the pre-kindergarten expenses so the public is more aware that it is more than just what goes on in the elementary, Junior High and High Schools.

Xuan commented that when trying to understand our preschool expenses, the "in-district preschool" line on the monthly report is confusing because it is not just enrollment. Because it is such a big budget driver, he requested that this be separated out in the future. Marie stated that these reports are designed by the state. She clarified that the number shown is all preschool children that receive services, not necessarily in the preschool. Marie agreed that an annual report to School Committee, after the October 1 enrollment numbers are done, would be a good way to show this preschool/itinerant data.

It was moved, seconded, and *unanimously*,

VOTED: that the Acton Public School Committee approve the FY'13 budget of \$27,210,233. as proposed

6.4 Policy Update

6.4.1 Assignment of Elementary Students from Other Schools File: JCAC – **FIRST READING**
Marie Altieri explained that this revision is being brought back to the School Committee after a review of other communities' policies. The Administration receives a number of requests from parents who want to send their children to kindergarten at an age younger than our policy JEB states. Mike Coppolino asked that "or completed" be added to the last paragraph, first sentence. Xuan Kong asked if other policies state that the principal's decision is final, expressing concern about consistency. John Petersen agreed. Steve Mills said that at the school level it is the principal's decision.

6.5 EDCO Update

Steve Mills explained that the EDCO Collaborative is made up of two boards and lawyers are discussing whether a conflict of interest exists. EDCO Executive Director Dorsey Yearly will attend the Joint School Committee meeting on 3/1/12 to answer questions. Boxborough School Committee will be invited. Members should send questions to Mike who will forward to Dorsey. Xuan was thanked for the information he shared. Dorsey is gathering more data to be sent to the Committee. The key question is whether EDCO will continue two service contracts currently awarded to the private entity (Greater Boston Education Collaborative). If EDCO accepts the contract obligations and becomes employer of additional employees, long-term benefit (e.g., OPEB) liability is of concern. If EDCO does not continue with the contract, there will be short-term unemployment liability for 40 terminated employees.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.3 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info – February 1

Marie Altieri and Steve Mills spoke with Boxborough Superintendent, Curt Bates about opportunities to send some of our Acton Kindergarten students to the Blanchard School in Boxborough next fall. This could potentially mean one section of our Kindergarten could be eliminated. If each student paid \$2500 (from state funding) and 10 Kindergarteners' families agreed, it would cost the District \$25,000 to free up a classroom for half of a day.

Marie reported that Boxborough currently only has 38 students registered for Kindergarten and they expect 4 or 5 more this summer. They will probably open their kindergarten for Choice students. Half of Boxborough's choice students from other towns are special education students. All choice students that graduate from Blanchard's 6th grade are permitted to attend RJGJHS and ABRHS. The next APS meeting will have more specifics. Our District has more requests for full day Kindergarten than we can serve and Boxborough has openings. Acton families would be required to provide transportation to Boxborough if this is considered.

The Committee agreed to continue consideration of this option. An Open House will be done at Blanchard. After our public registration is done (March 13 and 14), a final decision could be made. John Petersen asked for scenarios through 6th grade to be sure the issues are really understood. At the next APS meeting, the Committee could decide if they want to take a position on regionalization. It might be helpful for the public to know how the Committee feels about the issue when considering a partnership with Blanchard for kindergarten.

7.5 Acton Town Election Update – March 27, 2012

Mike Coppolino reminded people of the upcoming election. Three School Committee candidates are running for 2 openings – Dennis Bruce, Adria Cohen and Deanne O'Sullivan.

7.7 “Pledge” Motion Hearing held 2/13/12, Jane & John Doe and the American Humanist Association v. Acton-Boxborough Regional School District, the Town of Acton Public Schools and Dr. Stephen E. Mills, Superintendent of Schools, (Original complaint posted 12/2/10 addendum at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings10-11.shtml>) Superintendent Steve Mills appeared in Middlesex Superior Court on Monday, 2/13/12. Many calls and emails are coming in. A motion was made to dismiss the case. A judgment should be received in a few weeks or months.

Marie Altieri distributed FY'12 APS FTE Staffing by School for future discussion by the Committee. John asked for FTE distribution in FY11, 12 and 13, with full time and part time staff separately.

Xuan stated that a brief School Committee meeting may be needed in April to vote on the EDCO issue.

NEXT MEETINGS

March 1, 7:30 pm Joint ABRSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

March 15, 7:00 pm APSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

March 22, 7:30 pm JT SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of documents used: Agenda, FY'12 APS FTE Staffing by School

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High

February 16, 2012
7:00 p.m.

AGENDA with addendum

- 1.0 CALL TO ORDER (7:00)
- 2.0 CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION
- 3.0 STATEMENT OF WARRANT
- 4.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - 4.1 APS SC January 19, 2012
- 5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- 6.0 APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS
 - 6.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group– *Marie Altieri* (7:10)
 - 6.1.1 Health Insurance Savings Estimates
 - 6.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report – *John Petersen (oral)* (7:20)

APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE OPEN BUDGET HEARING (7:30)

(Please bring 1/28/12 Budget Binder, posted online at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>)

- 6.3 FY'13 Budget - *Steve Mills, Don Aicardi*
 - 6.3.1 ALG Report – *Xuan Kong* (7:30)
 - 6.3.1.1 Minutes of 1/30/12 meeting
 - 6.3.1.2 Materials from 2/16/12 meeting (*addendum*)
 - 6.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report – *Xuan Kong* (7:40)
Meetings on 2/7/12 and 2/16/12 (oral)
 - 6.3.3 APS FY'13 Budget Discussion and **VOTE** – *Steve Mills, Don Aicardi* (7:45)
 - 6.3.3.1 Douglas Special Education Program – *Steve Mills, Liza Huber (oral)*
 - 6.3.3.2 Art/Music/Physical Education Specialists – *D. Bookis (addendum)*(7:55)
 - 6.3.3.3 Classroom Assistants – *Marie Altieri* (8:05)
 - 6.3.3.4 Early Childhood Programming – *Liza Huber (addendum)* (8:15)
 - 6.3.3.5 Presentation Slides (*brought to meeting*) (8:20)
- 6.4 Policy Update (8:35)
 - 6.4.1 Revision: Assignment of Elementary Students from Other Schools File: JCAC –
FIRST READING – *Marie Altieri*
 - 6.4.1.1 Proposed Policy Revision
 - 6.4.1.2 Current Policy
- 6.5 EDCO Update – *Steve Mills (addendum)* (8:40)
- 7.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION (8:45)
 - 7.1 Pupil Services
 - 7.1.1 ELL Student Enrollment Report – February 1
 - 7.2 FY'12 Monthly APS Financial Reports

Materials for this meeting are posted at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>

- 7.3 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info – February 1
- 7.4 Correspondence from the Community
- 7.5 Acton Town Election Update – March 27, 2012 – *Mike Coppolino (oral)*
- 7.6 School Newsletters
 - Conant Crier: <http://conant.ab.mec.edu/pto/newsletter.html>
 - Douglas Digest: <http://douglas.ab.mec.edu/pto/digest.html>
 - Gates Gazette: <http://gatesschoolpto.org/gazette>
 - McCarthy-Towne Bulletin: <http://www.mctptso.org/bulletin/>
 - Merriam Comm News: <http://www.merriampto.org/Merriam>
 - Acton Public School Preschool: <http://ab.mec.edu/Preschool/index.htm>
- 7.7 “Pledge” Motion Hearing held 2/13/12, Jane & John Doe and the American Humanist Association v. Acton-Boxborough Regional School District, the Town of Acton Public Schools and Dr. Stephen E. Mills, Superintendent of Schools, (Original complaint posted 12/2/10 addendum at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings10-11.shtml>)

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ADJOURNMENT (9:00)