

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes (accepted 12/15/11)

Cafeteria
McCarthy-Towne School

October 20, 2011
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, John Petersen
Members Absent: none
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

Chairman Michael Coppolino called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201208 dated 10/18/11 in the amount of \$249,811.61 was signed by the Chairs and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 9/15/11 APS SC Meeting were approved as written. Xuan Kong abstained because he was not at the meeting. The minutes of the 5/19/11 APS SC Meeting were approved as written. Dennis Bruce abstained because he was not a Committee member at the time of the meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT

David Krane, Principal of the McCarthy-Towne School presented on their Block Scheduling Model and Use of the Math Assistant. The Block Schedule was adopted this year and allows for three 45 minute Instructional Block periods a week at each grade level, 1-6. Benefits include: No special education services pull-out during instructional block, promotes collaboration, and facilitates use of the math assistant. This new 19 hour assistant position supports mostly grades 3-6, although also provides remedial support for primary grades and some small group pull-out for enrichment and remediation. David introduced the District Math Coach, Jean Oviatt-Rothman, and said that half of the total district requests for support from the math coach come from McCarthy-Towne (11 of 22). He thanked Jean for being such a valuable resource.

When asked, "How will we know what the effect of these changes will be?" David said that they will help identify specific areas that kids tell us they need help with. John Petersen asked about a 360 review and how feedback will be integrated from it for the teacher evaluation process.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.1 MCAS Update

Deborah Bookis reported on this year's spring 2011 MCAS performance and growth data, as well as action items and initiatives to address the goals. Acton Public Schools achieved a Performance Rating of "very high" for both English Language Arts and mathematics and the NCLB Accountability Status of "no status" for both. The District as a whole did not achieve AYP in ELA for 2011 as the 3-5 Grade Span missed its Performance Target. The cumulative 3 year growth data for the district was strong, in the third year of "Student Growth Percentiles". Areas requiring continued attention include: mathematics at grade four, open response questions, and the special education subgroup at grade six for mathematics. In the near future, attention will be needed for Science, Technology and Engineering, as determined by the release of the new state STE frameworks. See comprehensive report in packet.

The School Committee asked what communities we are comparing our results to. Deborah said those with similar socioeconomics and educational expectations, including those in the EDCO collaborative. A member asked why we might see great student growth percentiles in math but the same kids not making similar progress in ELA. Deborah said that ELA is tricky and it is the first year that students have open response questions. Math and ELA are different skill sets. Also the difference is not in the low range, but still in the higher range. Mike Coppolino said that the state considers any SGP of 40 and below to sometimes be of concern. Deborah emphasized that students are compared to their cohorts. Bill Guthlein spoke from the audience about SGP and how valuable looking at it by school can be. He encouraged the Administration to use this data and said that the SpedPAC will be bringing this to the administrators' attention.

6.2 Funding of Classroom Assistants

Dr. Mills began by stating that he thought he had a recommendation last week regarding funding of classroom assistants, or paraprofessionals, but he has listened to many opinions and now is back in the information gathering stage. No decisions will be made tonight and any decisions made will be for the next school year. He will eventually recommend some changes that may be difficult. The new Long Range Strategic Plan goals include increased adult interaction with students, including more funding for paraprofessionals, so this effort fits in with the plan.

Public dollars must be divided equally. Because Merriam has more students than the other schools, their numbers will look a little higher. Dr. Mills emphasized that everyone is very, very grateful for what parents donate to the schools through the PTOs and other programs. This review started with an effort to alleviate some of the pressure that the PTOs have been feeling to raise such large amounts of money every year. The recommendation that Douglas and Merriam share some of their profits with the other three schools is no longer a consideration due to legal restrictions. See slides. Although many of our programs have had great success, they have also created some troublesome issues for some of the schools. Private funding in public schools has become an issue.

The School Committee was asked for questions/comments:

John Petersen commented that the schools have struggled in Acton to balance the tax burden with the need to educate students and now it has pushed us in to a gray area of private funding of assistants. If assistants perform an important educational role, why are we not funding them from our public revenues? He also pointed out that the All Day Kindergarten (ADK) programs generate profit in each building. If each principal were allowed to price and manage his own ADK, it could work out that one school could have two ADK classes and end up with twice the profit. Would that be appropriate? What is public education and what does that mean? Each school runs on approximately \$5 million, so this about 2 – 3% of the schools' budgets and has become a significant concern with no easy answers. People were asked to stay focused on what public education is, and to determine what should really be offered in the schools.

Dennis Bruce said that assistant funding and all the effort/pressure that now goes into the PTO donations that create those funds was an issue during the last election cycle.

Xuan Kong said that in preparing for this meeting he read the minutes from the last meeting describing how Douglas students raising \$8500 to build a school in Kenya. He too has been very involved in fundraising but his role tonight is not as a parent, it is as an elected School Committee member. He has responsibility for the wellbeing of 2000 students in Acton. He asked the members of the public that filled the cafeteria what the best decision he could make would be that would benefit the students.

Mike Coppolino read a statement describing the history of PTO fundraising. (Attachment A) He urged people to be a constructive part of the solution as they try to understand the situation and be respectful of all involved.

Many members of the public shared comments and asked questions.

A parent new to Merriam said one of the major reasons she is there is Merriam's commitment to staffing their assistants. She felt school choice was great because parents can choose another school if they felt pressure to raise these funds.

Kim McOsker said that the other schools have different issues. Some would like the district to take on more of the funding for the assistants so the PTOS could fund enrichment programs.

It was pointed out that in the Before/After School programs parents get a service for their money. There is no service received from a PTO donation.

Karen Sonner, teacher at Merriam and AEA Vice President, asked for clarification of the issues. Mike Coppolino said there is concern about the individual schools, as separate entities, administering their own programs versus the entire school administration running them. Dr. Mills and Marie Altieri have met extensively with the five elementary principals. They all realize that they are not private entities and that lack of success of one school may affect all the others.

Carol Leandro, former PTO chair and a Merriam teaching assistant, thanked the Committee for bringing this issue forward in a constructive way. She described it as "a dilemma with no perfect solution". The term "inequities between the schools" was disturbing her. She said there are differences in schools' PTO fundraising, and the success of their programs, due to many factors that are usually obvious to parents when they choose a school. Merriam makes some sacrifices to get an assistant in every classroom and as a result, doesn't have a special reading program or cultural program, or other asset that another school has. She urged the Committee to stop using the word "inequity", and focus on a school district goal to fund more paraprofessionals in different ways.

Michelle Caterina, Co-chair of McCarthy-Towne PTSO, said she does not feel pressure to raise tremendous amounts of money.

Questions were asked about how Community Education runs their Before/After School programs. Astrid Trostorff said that these issues are very complex and that a decision was made by the previous superintendent years ago that a McT program had to be run by Community Education.

Deanne O'Sullivan, Co-chair of the Douglas PTO, shared concerns about how the School Committee was proceeding. She felt that three schools have not been given the opportunity to fully fund themselves. She advocated for letting them try and if it doesn't work, then pooling resources could be considered. Douglas gave \$50,000 to be sure every classroom in the district got a smart board. In response to some accounting questions, Marie Altieri said that with the increased number of people hired, the Finance and HR departments of Central Office have also seen an increase in their staff time needed for this processing.

Mike Coppolino confirmed that there is no intention to dismantle any of the before/after school programs. How they are operated and administered and by whom, is what is being discussed. The key is that we are running a public school system, not a private business, and a large private pot of money is being set aside for services provided in this public venue.

Another McT PTSO member thanked the School Committee and Administration for the additional \$108,000 to fund assistants and said he does feel that it is a burden on the PTSO every year to raise this money. An Extended Day program would be an easier way to raise money going forward. He urged the Committee to talk about a goal for each school to have a number of paraprofessionals so our students do have the increased adult/student contact and the schools can keep their individual flavor.

Heather Harer, former School Committee member, PTO Co-chair and current Douglas staff member, said this is not a small issue and has been discussed for years. The first issue has been addressed with the \$108,000 to reduce the stress on the PTOS. This is very positive and will be well spent. The second issue of before/after school programs is more difficult. In her opinion, the big question is that we have a model in two schools that is very successful, and is being run very efficiently and responsibly. Three other programs are under the Community Education umbrella and they generate significant income due to how long ago they were developed. If all programs go under the Community Ed umbrella, Douglas and Merriam have a lot to lose if the total is divided by five.

Chris Whitbeck, Principal of the Douglas School, explained that one reason why the balance in his account is so large is because eight years ago when he started in his position, Superintendent Bill Ryan required Chris to have all the funds for a year of the program in the bank for the next year. That is why \$136,000 shows uncommitted in his chart. He said that the Douglas program is an entity of the school system just like Community Education is. He disagreed with it being called "private". He is in full support of the additional money and keeping things at a certain level so other schools can catch up to some degree. He hopes that the funding levels of these two programs will be maintained.

Mike Coppolino reiterated that he welcomed all parents, PTOs, Staff, Administration and Principals to give input on these important issues and be part of the solution.

John Petersen raised the point that how the schools raise money and how they spend it are two different issues. In his opinion, the role of School Committee is to ask many questions to be sure everyone does their best thinking. The next step is a shift to the macro balancing resources of the community with needs of the schools. He asked that parents be aware of that same thing. When it comes to operation of the schools, if the right people have been hired, we have to let them do their job. The School Committee can't cherry pick items because it unbalances things. As this discussion continues, he requested that how money is raised versus spent be kept separate, and that the right people be allowed to decide.

6.3 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Conant School PTO

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept a gift of \$30,000 from the Conant School PTO to fund teaching assistants for the 2011 – 2012 school year. This will be combined with \$5,000 of unused PTO funds from the 2010 – 2011 school year for a total gift of \$35,000.

6.4 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Douglas School PTO

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept a gift of \$49,845.47 from the Douglas School PTO to be combined with \$8,196 from previous years to fund the staff outlined in their letter.

6.5 Recommendation to Accept Douglas at Dawn and Dusk Program Funding

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept a gift of \$131,872.00 from the Douglas at Dawn & Dusk Program to fund classroom assistants.

6.6 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Gates School PTO

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept a gift of \$44,829.74 from the Gates PTO to be combined with \$1,170.26 from the Gates PTO account for a total of \$46,000 to fund classroom assistants.

6.7 Recommendation to Accept Gift from McCarthy-Towne School PTSO

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept a gift of \$84,000. from the McCarthy-Towne School PTSO to be combined with \$15,547. from last year's donation for a total of \$99,547. to support staffing.

6.8 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Merriam School PTO and Merriam Mornings/After Hours Program Funding

Merriam PTSO co-chair, Neena Arora, respectfully asked that the School Committee hold their donation letter until the next meeting. In light of tonight's discussion, they would like to discuss their donation with their members. They have a PTO meeting on Nov 2.

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to table the Merriam donation letter

6.9 Policy Subcommittee Updates

6.9.1 Revised: Use of School Facilities (File: KF) – **FIRST READING**

6.9.1.1 Proposed Policy Revision

6.9.1.2 Current Policy

6.9.1.3 Draft Use of School Facilities Procedures & Fees (File: KF-R)

Kim McOsker presented the proposed policy. Mike asked what was meant by “Condo Associations” under the classifications in the procedures. It was also requested that the procedures be presented without the track changes at the next meeting.

6.9.2 New: Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – **FIRST READING**

Marie Altieri said that this was mostly a regional issue. This is the new policy tied to corporate sponsorship. The majority of the language is in the procedures and feedback is welcome on both. Xuan asked if MASC had a policy on this. Theirs does not support it but Marie will get what Sharon McManus collected for the subcommittee. Xuan asked for a comparison and contrast of similar policies to be provided at the next meeting.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.6 Food Service Update – Marie Altieri gave an update on the new payment system. 2200 kids now have online prepaid accounts. It is taking time for the lunch lines to move through, but it is slowly improving.

NEXT MEETINGS: November 3, 7:00 p.m. in the **ABRHS** Library, Joint APS/ABRSC/Acton Board of Selectmen Meeting followed by ABRSC Meeting to review the Segal Plan and discuss what may be done regarding health insurance
November 17, 7:30 p.m. in the Merriam Library, APS SC Meeting

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

Attachment A: Statement read by Michael Coppolino
Agenda attached

**Statement read by Michael Coppolino, Chairperson of the APS School Committee
10/20/11 Meeting**

First off, I want to thank all of you for coming to our meeting tonight; the great attendance speaks volumes as to how interested you all are in your children's education. Though I have not replied personally to every email we received, I also want to thank everyone who emailed us with their concerns and suggestions.

I'd like to take a few minutes to provide some perspective on the topics of classroom assistants, PTO fundraising, and before and after school programs.

To be clear we won't be taking any votes this evening, other than to accept gifts from the 5 elementary schools for funds to be used for 2011-2012.

Classroom assistants were first introduced in certain elementary classes almost 20 years ago when Dr. Isa Zimmermann was Supt in order to mitigate the effects of large class sizes e.g. 27 or 28 students per class. Basic amounts of funding were provided in the operating budget and the SC, at that time, allowed PTOs to raise additional funds to be used only for non-certified staffing.

Approximately 10 years ago, Mary Ann Ashton and I met with the PTO chairs and reviewed their fundraising activities including ice cream socials, auctions, donating hundreds of pounds of pennies..., etc and we were both appalled at the large amount of money that parents at various schools were generating in order to provide services everyone felt was beneficial to their children's education.

Fast forward to today; class sizes are dramatically lower, currently 22.9 as of Oct. 1, 2011, however classroom assistants are now engrained in the cultures of all our elementary schools, supported by District funds as well as PTO funding and for many schools more recently, revenues generated by before and after school programs. These are distinct, yet inter-related issues that we need to deal with, some over longer periods of time than others.

Change, as is often said, is inevitable, so instead of ignoring what has happened in the past this administration has chosen to do something about the inequities. Please understand that this has evolved over a long period of time.

And this is where you can help. Being part of the solution is far more valuable than being part of the problem. With guidance from the School Committee, Dr. Mills and his staff, including principals, PTOs and other interested parties will help craft a solution over the next month or two. As elected public officials, school committee members upon recommending budgets annually, have a fiduciary responsibility to the public at large, not only to parents of school-age children, but to every taxpayer in Acton.

We are here for the common good, in its fullest sense, so please understand that as we move this discussion forward.

I'd like to ask people to be respectful, as all the emails have been, and request that you limit your comments to 2 minutes. Also, if your opinion has already been expressed via email or here this evening, please refrain from repeating it, as I promise you we will be listening carefully and will review the tape if we have any uncertainty.

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Cafeteria
McCarthy-Towne School

October 20, 2011
7:30 p.m.

AGENDA with addendum

1. CALL TO ORDER
 2. STATEMENT OF WARRANT
 3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - 3.1 9/15/11 APS Meeting
 - 3.2 5/19/11 APS Meeting (*addendum*)
 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
 5. EDUCATION REPORT - David Krane, Principal, McCarthy-Towne School (7:45)
 6. SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS
 - 6.1 MCAS Update – *Deb Bookis (8:00)*
 - 6.2 Funding of Classroom Assistants – *Steve Mills (8:15) (additional memo & chart in addendum)*
 - 6.3 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Conant School PTO – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills (9:15) (revision in addendum)*
 - 6.4 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Douglas School PTO – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 6.5 Recommendation to Accept Douglas at Dawn and Dusk Program Funding – **VOTE** – *S.Mills*
 - 6.6 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Gates School PTO – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 6.7 Recommendation to Accept Gift from McCarthy-Towne School PTO - **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 6.8 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Merriam School PTO and Merriam Mornings/After Hours Program Funding - **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 6.9 Policy Subcommittee Updates (9:30)
 - 6.9.1 Revised: Use of School Facilities (File: KF) – **FIRST READING** – *Kim McOsker*
 - 6.9.1.1 Proposed Policy Revision
 - 6.9.1.2 Current Policy
 - 6.9.1.3 Draft Use of School Facilities Procedures & Fees (File: KF-R)
 - 6.9.2 New: Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – **FIRST READING** – *Marie Altieri*
 7. FOR YOUR INFORMATION (9:40)
 - 7.1 School Improvement Plans (revised): Conant, McCarthy-Towne
 - 7.2 Enrollment Report, October 2011
 - 7.3 ELL Student Population Report
 - 7.4 2012-2013 Kindergarten Registration Schedule (*addendum*)
 - 7.5 Monthly APS Object Summary and SPED Reports
 - 7.6 Food Service Update – *Marie Altieri (oral)*
 - 7.7 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>
 - 7.8 Community Correspondence (*addendum*)
 8. NEXT MEETINGS: November 3, 7:00 p.m. in the **ABRHS** Library, Joint APS/ABRSC/Acton Board of Selectmen Meeting followed by ABRSC Meeting ??
November 17, 7:30 p.m. in the Merriam Library, APS SC Meeting
- ADJOURN (10:00)