

**ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS MINUTES (approved 1/5/12)**

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

**December 1, 2011
7:00 p.m. Joint School Committee Meeting
Followed by ABR School Committee Meeting**

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino (arrived at 9:00 p.m.), Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot
Members Absent: Kim McOsker
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Steve Mills, Beth Petr, CASE Executive Director Teresa Watts

JT APS/AB SC CALL TO ORDER

In the absence of Chair, Michael Coppolino and Vice-Chair, Kim McOsker, the Acton Public School Committee (APSC) Secretary, Beth Petr, called the APS School Committee to order at 7:02 p.m.

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to elect Xuan Kong APS School Committee Chair pro tem for this meeting

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee (ABRSC) was called to order by Chair John Petersen at 7:03 p.m.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

APS Warrant #201211 dated 11/29/11 in the amount of \$100,951.28 was signed by the Chair and circulated for signatures.

AB Warrant #12-011 dated 11/17/11 in the amount of \$1,962,590.41 and warrant #12-012 dated 12/1/11 in the amount of \$1,277,831.97 was signed by the chair and circulated for signatures.

APPROVAL OF JOINT and ABRSC MINUTES

The minutes of the Joint and AB School Committee meeting of October 6, 2011 were approved unanimously by the ABRSC, and then approved unanimously by the APSC. The minutes of the September 1, 2011 and November 3, 2011 SC meetings will be reviewed at the next meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – Parent Michele Densen read a letter that she emailed to the School Committee a few hours earlier. She is concerned about the safety of her child’s bus stop and has been working with the Transportation department. Dr. Mills will check on the issue. (Attachment A)

Doug Tindal spoke for the Acton Finance Committee. FinCom’s Point of View document will be ready for ALG next week.

PRESENTATION: CONCORD AREA SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (CASE)

John Petersen welcomed Teresa Watts, Executive Director of CASE, Curt Bates, CASE Board of Directors Chair and Mary Brolin, Boxborough School Committee member. Liza Huber gave some contextual information about the CASE programs.

Teresa began by saying that CASE started in 1974 and is an extension of our community. CASE classes are for students who require programs not available in their schools because they are such a small cohort for particular needs. CASE allows children to become part of the fabric of their schools. The programs also increase the quality of life for children with significant needs due to the concentration of targeted resources. Cost efficiencies are also gained, but that is not the top priority. An autism spectrum class is expected to replace CASE's last deaf class.

Transportation for CASE students is very individualized, like their learning. Communities were having great difficulty providing transportation for their CASE students, in part because it is costly. Lincoln Sudbury is the only community that provides their own transportation. Liza Huber reported that after replicating the transportation needs for the District based on driving our own CASE students, despite some internal benefits (local control and long range planning for transportation costs), "... the cost of drivers, the on-going costs for vehicles, as well as the potential administrative oversight, far exceed the current assessment costs for CASE transportation."

Teresa referenced an independent analysis included in the Future Management System report of February 22, 2011 (William Barr, Lead Consultant) that states regarding special education transportation, "A typical stand alone district spends approximately \$12,000 - \$15,000 per student." Using this measure, Teresa said that the FY11 CASE transportation assessments save CASE districts in the range of 20 – 50%.

Transportation Questions:

Xuan Kong said that three years ago a task force looked into the Districts' special education cost driving factors, including how CASE passed their costs on to the districts. There was never any thought to withdraw from CASE, but the Committee questioned whether CASE transportation was as cost efficient as possible. Teresa said that Groton and Westford did reviews and were very impressed with what CASE was doing. Several years ago the state reviewed the cost of special education transportation and looked at a variety of models, including data from CASE. CASE clusters around the home and school locations, which is more sophisticated than some studies can handle. Teresa is always very open to looking for ways to save money. She said CASE is expanding their base and consequently increasing economies of scale, but they are almost to the maximum before they would have to increase overhead. Few collaboratives offer transportation, choosing to contract services out. The state thinks CASE is cost effective based on the consolidation of routes.

GPS is now used to monitor compliance with the time requirement that students can be on a bus and tracking the vans/students. One of the newer efficiencies is to reimburse parents who drive their children directly. For regular education, regional transportation is reimbursed by the state, but there is no reimbursement for special education transportation. This comes up every year as something that should be changed. John Petersen asked that the School Committee be made aware of this political issue when it comes up again on Beacon Hill.

Xuan read from Liza Huber's 12/11 memo (page 2 of the Special Education Task Force Report of December 2008 <http://ab.mec.edu/about/aboutpdf/SPED-FTF-II-FinalReportDec08.pdf>):

"In addition, CASE member districts should hold the collaborative more accountable for the effectiveness of its transportation services by analyzing fully its current practices, and instituting measurable metrics to assess efficiencies on an on-going basis. This is a very important component, as CASE transportation provides services for *all special education students* in these and other districts,

not only those who participate in programs offered by the CASE Collaborative.”

He advocated strongly for CASE to be held accountable for their transportation costs and for the program to provide quantifiable metrics of those costs so they can be compared year to year. Dr. Mills will bring this request to the CASE Board meeting tomorrow. Brigid asked how requests are passed along to CASE leadership. She asked if multiple CASE community members need to make a request before it is considered, or is it appropriate to ask CASE to consider a request made by only one community member.

Program Questions:

Xuan was on the financial task force that brought up these issues three years ago, and he still has concerns. The average annual cost of a CASE program is approximately \$50,000 per student. He asked if the price for a non-CASE district student could be set higher than the current 10% premium. Teresa said it is a formula set by the Board of Directors. Mary Brolin pointed out that some of these non-CASE district students are filling open seats and the incremental cost is low.

Our Districts transport 99 students using CASE. Westford transports 105. Westford doesn't include health insurance in their cost quote. Adding health insurance cost would bring Westford's base cost much closer to our assessment. Hidden costs make it hard to compare some of these numbers. CASE dispatching handles our students and families seamlessly but would be much more difficult independently. Based on recent conversations that Liza had with Westford administrators, Westford and Acton costs are much closer than they initially appear on web based reporting.

Because CASE does not have physical assets, all classrooms are in other districts, Xuan asked how rental fees are calculated. There are many “in kind contributions”. The Board voted that each classroom will receive a \$7500 room credit, but the students in those towns also benefit by attending school in their own towns. Xuan read another passage from page 2 of the 12/08 report, also highlighted in Liza's 12/11 memo:

“The Districts, as well as all CASE member towns, should re-examine the cost accounting strategy and methods used for the overall CASE program, as well as for individual programs. In light of the State's circuit breaker reimbursement program, actual costs should be assigned to each special education program, rather than using a gross average across all programs. Analyses demonstrate that differential cost structures would optimize the reimbursement opportunities for all member districts. In addition, actual cost accounting will identify inefficiencies within the Collaborative, and encourage member districts to provide needed resources (such as space for new programs, and associated maintenance and utilities) with fair value credited to those districts.”

He asked the CASE Directors to consider that good accounting could help member districts get additional funding from circuit breaker assistance.

In response to a question, Liza said that she tracks medical progress and changes to help plan for upcoming educational programs and students' needs. An example is that hearing impaired programs have changed dramatically since many young children now receive cochlear implants.

Liza thanked the Special Education Task Force for their work and recommendations made three years ago. One of the changes that resulted is that at that time there was no aggregate tuition to allow for circuit breaker reimbursement and that change has really benefited the programs. John

thanked Teresa and Liza for helping to educate the School Committee on the CASE Collaborative programs.

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Collaborative Process

John Petersen stated that Marc Lewis, President of the Acton Education Association, sent an email to the Acton Board of Selectmen after their meeting on November 21 which read in part:

“Dear Members of the Board of Selectmen,
Thank you for your decision tonight to engage all stakeholders in a series of conversations about health insurance over the next two months. I am very eager to begin that process and am confident that we will be able to make significant progress between now and the beginning of February. Our immediate challenge is to schedule dates that work for all parties involved. I, certainly, will make every attempt to make myself as available as I can be but would very much like to put several dates on the calendar as soon as possible.”

Xuan Kong read a statement from Michael Coppolino:

“On behalf of the Acton Public School Committee, I would like to thank Mike Gowing and the Acton Board of Selectmen for honoring our request to have a representative of our Committee participate in the Health Insurance Study Committee that is begin formed. I am confident that concerted and collaborative efforts by all stakeholders will produce plan options that are both high-quality and cost-effective.”

Pat Haras read the following statement:

“Hi. I am Pat Haras and I am the President of the Acton Public & Acton Boxborough Office Support Association we are more commonly known as OSA. We in our Association thank the Acton Public & Acton Boxborough Regional Schools and Health Insurance Trust for this opportunity to work in a collaborative sprit with all unions on the issue of Health Insurance. We are well aware of the high cost of Health Care and realize that we will be intensively looking at cost sharing, shifting and plan designs. It is our challenge and goal to provide a health plan that allows **all town, school employees and retirees with a health plan acceptable to all**. This collaboration has an opportunity to leave a legacy on health insurance by which other towns may look to us rather than looking at MGL 69. We thank you for inviting us to participate in the solution.”

A statement was provided by Bob Evans, Chair of the Acton Health Insurance Trust (HIT) regarding HIT recommendations going forward. While the Trust, as an entity, will not be involved in the proposed informal discussions, if asked, the Trust is prepared to assist in the production and analysis of additional data. (Attachment B)

John read part of an email sent by Acton Town Manager Steve Ledoux regarding the new collaborative working group that is set to meet on December 7th.

Formation of Joint School Committee and Town Study Committee

The School Committees discussed what they would like to do with respect to the ongoing process regarding health care plan design. Because half of the schools’ employees are directly involved in this issue, it was deemed necessary and constructive to have representation in the collaborative group. Mike talked to Kim earlier and she would like to take on this responsibility.

Acton Public School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: that Kim McOsker would represent the Acton Public School Committee at the collaborative working group meetings considering health care redesign.

The AB Regional School Committee felt it important to be represented in this group as well. Dr. Mills appreciated that the ABRSC wants to be part of this group and he stated that it is troubling to think that groups of staff could have different health care options.

Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: that Kim McOsker would represent the Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee at the collaborative working group meetings considering health care redesign.

7.2 Enrollment Projections

Marie Altieri presented the Ashtons' enrollment projections for the AB Regional School District. She said that enrollment is down from last year. The peak was at the High School last year. Chapter 70 aid projections must be kept in mind. The 1% shift from FY12 to FY13 in the Boxborough to Acton Enrollment ratio results in an assessment shift from Boxborough to Acton of \$300,000 for FY13. This is a significant financial impact.

Michael Coppolino arrived at the meeting at this time and assumed the Chairman role from Xuan.

7.3 Long Range Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Mills said that this process began exactly a year ago, and he is very grateful for the serious effort that went into the final document. He intends to use it extensively for many discussions throughout the year. Brigid Bieber commented that she has thought a lot about the Committees' previous discussion of the prioritization of the values and she is pleased with the social/emotional priority being first. She stated that the Districts are missing some kids who are not able to engage and the schools could do a better job in that area. Increasing adult – student interaction is one of the keys. John pointed out that Year 1 of the Plan is FY12 so we are now in Year 1. Dr. Mills said that the annual Fall SMART goals and budget discussions will include review of this Plan.

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: that the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee approve the Long Range Strategic Plan as presented.

Acton Public School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: that the Acton Public School Committee approve the Long Range Strategic Plan as presented.

7.4 FY'13 Budget

Dr. Mills began the FY' 13 Investment Budget presentation, followed by Don Aicardi. Assumptions and key decisions were reviewed (see slides). The combined reserve balance before FY12 budget season started was \$8.3m. This includes certified free cash (\$4.22m), NESWC balance (\$2.43m) and ABRSD E&D (\$1.7m). The final actual amount of reserves used to balance the FY12 budget(s) was \$1.8m. The original FY12 Plan used \$2.0m. The estimated beginning balance of reserves entering FY13 is \$9.1m.

A level service budget estimate is a 3.1% increase at APS and a 3.46% increase at ABRSD, from the FY12 final budget. The Committee discussed the definition of "level service" and questioned the \$270,000 to be included in the ABRSD figure for the Lower Fields Project. This was a

judgment call, given that the Committee approved the expense. Bruce Sabot and Maria Neyland suggested that the budget be referred to as “level service plus \$270,000 for Lower Fields”. A 3% cost of living placeholder is in the figures for administrators, even though this has not been decided yet. Energy numbers are being scrubbed continuously. The Committee agreed that decisions should be based on the now approved Long Range Strategic Plan.

John Petersen asked that the budgets distinguish between one time and recurring costs and revenues. He said that level service should just be services as they were at the end of the school year. Lower fields should be noted as an additional expense and why. It was confirmed that the special education teacher and others that were approved later last year are built into the level service budget per a recent Acton Finance Committee member’s question.

Xuan asked about the FY13 circuit breaker revenue and how this year’s expenses will affect reimbursement. Liza said the CASE assessment will be voted tomorrow and she thinks our assessment will be a bit lower than this year.

Marie Altieri confirmed that the 3 % COLA placeholder is for non union salary. Hourly staff compensation is based on the union contract.

Bill Guthlein asked from the audience about the liability on other post retirement expenses. FinCom member Steve Noone said there is a \$5 million liability on the books for the region and if there’s a similar \$5 million for the town, that is a \$10 million liability. Bill felt this should start being addressed. John Petersen felt the FinCom needed to present their completed analysis to the SC before the SC discussed OPEB. John noted that OPEB will require discussion at a future meeting.

John Petersen and Mike Coppelino thanked Don Aicardi for an excellent Budget Presentation.

7.5 Discussion of Potential Acton Public School Students Tuitioning into Blanchard School

Bruce Sabot said this discussion is meant for APSC. The question came up last summer to reduce number of students per classroom in Acton, and help solve some of the need for more students at Blanchard. This would not be participation in “school choice”, it would be an agreement between the Acton and Boxborough school districts. Boxborough Superintendent Curt Bates said if there is interest, the February school vacation time frame would be when serious discussion should take place. Tuition figures are not known yet.

This could reduce pressure on our regional school district population, because if Boxborough does school choice the Regional School District has to accept these out of town students when they go to 7th grade from Blanchard. This could be an investment for our schools. John advocated for plugging in some numbers to analyze if this could solve some of our issues given our new enrollment numbers and that we are past the peak at the High School. Two Acton families did participate in school choice from Acton to Blanchard this year. Bruce Sabot will pull together some numbers and provide the Blanchard brochure for the next APS meeting. Dr. Bates will talk to Dr. Mills about this process.

The APS School Committee adjourned at 10:43 p.m. and the ABRSC meeting continued.

AB SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

8.1 Regional School District Study Committee Update

Xuan reported that the Study Committee discussed the benefit of accepting Acton students into Boxborough's Blanchard School. They have met twice and have assigned individuals to specific areas to work on. They would like to present their findings to the three School Committees and gather feedback in February.

8.2 ALG Report

Xuan reported that at the 11/10/11 meeting, representatives were asked to get input from their Boards on three topics. Should the Town of Acton and the Regional School Committee start to address OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) liability? The School Committee felt more information was needed on this topic. Regarding the FY13 budget, the Committee backed a budget assumption of level service plus 2% (plus Lower Fields Project expense), suggesting that \$2.6 million in reserves be used for funding. Because Acton did not tax to the maximum two years ago, ALG also asked for feedback on whether the Town should use that tax levy capacity or not for the next year.

8.3 BLF Report

Bruce Sabot reported that BLF met on 11/15/11. They have asked the Friends of Lower Fields (FOLF) to do a presentation on this project. Quarterly budget reviews will start in Boxborough. A capital budgeting process was discussed. Next meeting is 1/10/12. Bruce was asked who represents Boxborough on the Minuteman Nashoba Health Group Board. Margaret Dennehy is on the steering committee and the Board. Marie Altieri and John are tracking information on this.

8.4 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report

John Petersen reported on the meetings of 11/22/11 and 11/30/11. Draft audit findings for FY11 were discussed. The Cook & Co. FY12 Cash Flow Report showed a negative cash flow of \$0.35 million ytd, -2%. It was agreed that the HIT, as an entity, would not be involved in the informal town and school union/BOS/ABRSC collaborative process of modifying health insurance plan design, although they would be ready to provide information if asked.

8.5 Policy Subcommittee Update

8.5.1 Use of School Facilities

Maria Neyland reminded the Committee that the revised Policy was approved on 10/6/11 by the ABRSD and on 11/17/11 by the APSC. Although the Committee does not vote on procedures, the subcommittee wanted to bring it back to the group for a final review based on previous comments. Xuan asked about the addition of a senior administrator being required if 50% of a school building is being used. The subcommittee and administration view this as a safety issue. The amount of space being used is more of an issue than the number of people using it because it is harder to monitor use when people are spread out in a building. The goal is to make sure the administration has the procedures they need to ensure safety.

8.5.2 Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – SECOND READING

Maria Neyland reviewed the policy and procedures. The Superintendent will bring concerns to the School Committee if he has them when approving new advertising. Xuan Kong would like more structure in the policy and procedures, including a dollar amount that would trigger School Committee review.

It was moved, seconded and

VOTED: to approve the Advertising in Schools policy as presented.

(YES: Bieber, Bruce, Coppolino, Murphy, Neyland, Petersen, Sabot
NO: Kong)

8.6 Proposed 2012-2013 School Calendar

A survey was done last year regarding religious holidays and starting before/after Labor Day. The proposed calendar mirrors this year's calendar with two Jewish holidays and Good Friday off and starting before Labor Day.

It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: to accept the 2012-2013 School Calendar as proposed
The vote passed 7 to 6. (YES: Coppolino, Murphy, Petersen, Sabot and NO: Bieber, Bruce, Kong, Neyland)

8.7 Recommendation to Accept \$7,000 Gift from Friends of the Acton Libraries

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept this gift of \$4,500 for the ABRHS Library and \$2,500 for the RJGJHS Library with gratitude

8.8 Recommendation to Accept Gift of Treadmills from The Thoreau Club

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to accept this gift to the High School and Junior High School with gratitude

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Professional Day – 11/1/11, Deborah Bookis reported on a very successful day for staff. She said that it is very exciting now to see so many of the departments using the protocol training.

NEXT MEETINGS:

December 15 - 7:30 p.m. APS SC Meeting at RJG Jr High Library
January 5 – 7:30 p.m. ABR SC Meeting at RJG Jr High Library

The meeting adjourned at 11:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

Agenda
Attachment A: Letter from Michele Denson
Attachment B: Statement from Bob Evans

**ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

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

**December 1, 2011
7:00 p.m. Joint School Committee Meeting
Followed by ABR School Committee Meeting**

AGENDA

- 1.0 JT APS/AB SC CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**
1.1 APS SC Call to Order
Election of APS School Committee Chair pro tem – *Beth Petr*
1.2 ABRSC Call to Order
- 2.0 CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**
- 3.0 STATEMENT OF WARRANT**
- 4.0 APPROVAL OF JOINT and ABRSC MINUTES**
4.1 Joint SC November 3, 2011 (*brought to meeting*)
4.2 Joint SC October 6, 2011 (*addendum*)
4.3 AB SC September 1, 2011 (*brought to meeting*)
- 5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 6.0 PRESENTATION: CONCORD AREA SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (CASE)**
– *Teresa Watts, CASE Executive Director, Liza Huber, APSD/ABRSD Director of Pupil Services (7:10)*
- 7.0 JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS (7:40)**
7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Collaborative Process – *John Petersen*
7.1.1 Updates: Acton Board of Selectmen, Acton Education Association, Health Insurance Trust
7.1.2 Formation of Joint SC and Town Study Committee
7.1.3 ABRSC Participation in Process
7.2 Enrollment Projections – *Marie Altieri (7:55)*
7.3 Long Range Strategic Plan Update, 11/27/11 Draft – **VOTE** - *Steve Mills (8:05)*
7.4 FY'13 Budget – *Don Aicardi, Steve Mills (8:25)*
7.4.1 Proposed FY'13 Budget Schedule
7.4.2 FY'13 Operating Budget Assumptions/Key Decisions
7.4.3 Presentation slides
7.5 Discussion of Potential Acton Public School Students Tuitioning into Blanchard School – *Bruce Sabot (8:55)*

APS SC ADJOURNS, AB SC MEETING CONTINUES

8.0 AB SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- 8.1 Regional School District Study Committee Update – *Xuan Kong (oral)* (9:05)
- 8.2 ALG Report – *Xuan Kong (oral)*
- 8.3 BLF Report – *Maria Neyland (oral)*
- 8.4 HIT Report on meetings of 11/22/11 and 11/30/11 – *John Petersen*
- 8.5 Policy Subcommittee Update (9:25)
 - 8.5.1 Use of School Facilities - *Brigid Bieber*
 - 8.5.1.1 Revised Policy (approved 10/6/11, AB and 11/17/11, APS)
 - 8.5.1.2 Draft Use of School Facilities Procedures & Fees (File: KF-R) (*addendum*)
 - 8.5.2 Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – **SECOND READING** – *Brigid Bieber*
 - 8.5.2.1 Proposed New Policy
 - 8.5.2.2 Draft Advertising in Schools Procedures (File: KHB-R) (*revision in addendum*)
 - 8.5.2.3 Examples from other communities
- 8.6 Proposed 2012-2013 School Calendar – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills (9:40)*
- 8.7 Recommendation to Accept \$7,000 Gift from Friends of the Acton Libraries – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
- 8.8 Recommendation to Accept Gift of Treadmills from The Thoreau Club – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*

9.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION (9:50)

- 9.1 ABRHS Info
 - 9.1.1 12/1 Discipline Report (*next meeting*)
 - 9.1.2 Winter Athletic Coaches
- 9.2 RJ Grey Junior High Info
 - 9.2.1 12/1 Discipline Report (*next meeting*)
- 9.3 Professional Day Summary – 11/1/11, Deborah Bookis
- 9.4 ABRSD ELL Student Population, November 2011 (*next meeting*)
- 9.5 November 1 Enrollment Report
- 9.6 Chapter 69, Health Care Reform Letters
 - 9.6.1 Letter from J. Petersen, Chair ABRSC to M. Gowing, Chair Acton BOS dated 11/4/11
 - 9.6.2 Letter from P. Ashton, L. Rosenzweig-Morton, J. Chinitz, W. Foster to Acton Board of Selectmen dated 11/20/11
- 9.7 Correspondence from the Community

NEXT MEETINGS:

- December 15 - 7:30 p.m. APS SC Meeting at RJG Jr High Library
- January 5 – 7:30 p.m. ABR SC Meeting at RJG Jr High Library

ADJOURNMENT (10:00)

December 1, 2011

Michele Denson

Acton

RE: Bus 20, 38 Main Street

Dear School Committee members;

On December 23, 2008, about 6:40am, a man was killed on Main Street, next to Buscemi's Market. The accident happened very close to our house and when my husband came home from working the night shift, he was not able to get into our driveway. A police cruiser was in front of it, so he pulled into Buscemi's market to respectfully wait, knowing because of a phone call from me, that a fatality had happened. My husband began talking to clerk at Buscemi's who expressed sadness and frustration that a "kid had to be killed...we have been saying for years that this bus stop is unsafe, and now it is too late." It seemed that officers responding, and the witnesses initially thought that the dead person was a student carrying a backpack, walking to the school bus stop, in Buscemi's parking lot. It wasn't until later that we found out it was an adult. It was a scary reminder of how fast life can be taken away.

Fast forward to this past August; less than one week before our 12 year old was to begin as a 7th grader at RJ Grey Jr. High. We looked at the town newspaper to see that a's new bus stop now required him to cross Main Street, very close to the same place and time were the man was tragically killed. The bus stop requires the kids to stand in a busy convenience store parking lot as distracted drivers swing in to get their morning coffee. As a mother, I was immediately concerned. During rush hour (beginning around 6:30am) cars wiz by our house at a constant rate. The speed limit is 40 miles per hour

and there is a significant grade hill leading down to the bus stop. Large industrial trucks come down the hill at such a fast speed, that when they hit a rut that is in the road it actually shakes our house. It is usually dark when _____ needs to cross and the vision of the body draped in black on the road and the Buscemi clerk's words immediately came back to me. Why had they not changed this bus stop? It seemed unreal.

I immediately called the transportation company to express my concerns. I asked that the bus route be turned around so that _____ (and other kids) would be picked up on our side of the road. I became aware that students all up Main Street were crossing from the side with a side walk, to the other side and standing on Main Street, with no sidewalk. I was told that they would look into the spot and get back to me. The first day of school came and went and it took several days and several phone calls to get the man at transportation to respond to me. When he did finally respond, he spoke to my husband. He explained that the safety officer had reviewed the stop and that it was not safe. That their solution was that _____ should wait on the opposite side of the street and cross when the bus stopped. However, they would not be changing the route or the stop.

I tried to tell myself that this new plan would be ok. _____ would wait until the bus stopped on the opposite side, wait for the flashing red lights and then cross. He would be safe, I hoped. _____ used that stop for about a week. I then began to think of the "what if's." What if a truck, driving down that hill, at 40+ miles per hour can't stop in time? What if my rambunctious 12 year old doesn't look, or wait for the red lights to flash and hops out into the street when he sees the bus? What if during a dusting of snow, a car skids past that bus? What if the plow coming into our neighbor's driveway, that

_____ is supposed to stand in, can't see him through the huge snow mounds? What if....? I

began to realize that this "safe" solution was not safe at all. Given the conditions of the road, weather, the type of traffic, the time of day, the darkness, the uncertainty of cars being able to stop and the fact that a man WAS killed right in that spot, at that time of day, I couldn't risk it on "hope," the consequences could be death for our child. In my mind, the simple solution could be to turn the bus route around so that the bus picks him up on the right side. I called the transportation company again to express my concerns and began driving to school. They refused to change the route. Never once explaining why...never actually addressing our concerns...just saying "the safety officer says it is safe." It was clear that it was an inconvenience for them and they were frustrated with me.

This past month, the transportation company sent out a notice. They had changed at least 12 bus routes...but not ours. I was furious. How could they not recognize our concern? If they could change other bus routes, why not ours? When speaking with JD Head, head of transportation, he stated that the safety officer was a "third party arbitrator" who would address our concerns and look at the bus stop for safety. I asked for the officer's name to tell him our side. I felt that the transportation company had continued to be rigid and not addressed our concerns and that the officer should hear this from our point of view. I had already spoken with the superintendent's assistant, a vice principal at the Jr. High, even the assistant to my state rep, Jamie Eldridge; they concurred that my concerns did not seem unreasonable. Several of their comments regarded the fact that they would not want their child at that bus stop.

When the officer did finally return my call it was after speaking with transportation and already deciding his position...so much for "arbitration." This morning

when he call back he spoke with my husband, he clearly had already made up his mind to side with transportation before even speaking with us. He just repeating that the stop is safe. He became upset that my husband restated our concerns and expressed that my husband was being "argumentative" when he discussed the speed limit of 40mph...the officer insisting that it is 35mph. The proof is in the speed limit sign right outside of our house. This isn't a matter of opinion, you just have to take a look. 40mph.

The officer suggested that this was the first he was hearing of this issue...how can that be since we were told that he had been involved since August? Is someone lying? He explained that the school system has no responsibility for our child's safety until they get on the bus. Now I feel all warm and fuzzy inside. And insinuated that we weren't good parents because we refuse to drive our child across the street to the bus stop and wait...which by the way, until this issue is resolved, we continue to drive him each morning to school for his safety. But that we will get nowhere with our concerns over the safety of our child and the bus stop situation.

At this point I feel strongly that the bus company is being rigid for the sake of "being right" and the inconvenience of changing the route. I am a mother, who is fighting for the safety of my child and my concerns deserve to be heard and addressed. I am not asking for the moon; only to know that when my child leaves the house in the morning to go to school, that he will risk being killed on the way. I would hope that we live in a town were children's safety is valued, even if it isn't the school's "legal responsibility." I am asking that the school committee tell your transportation company to change bus 20 so that children are not crossing Main Street and that the bus stops are in a safe location. Thank you for your time.

Bob Evans, Chair of the Acton Health Insurance Trust, provided the following statement for the 12/1/11 AB School Committee meeting:

“The Health Insurance Trust was asked to study what, if any, saving in premium costs would be achieved were the Town and the Schools to adopt the plan design of the most popular GIC program, Tufts Navigator; and whether there would be additional savings from actually moving employees and retirees into the GIC. The Trust contracted with Segal and Co. to conduct the study. After receiving their Report the Trustees analyzed the results which suggested first year savings of approximately 8 percent from plan design changes and additional savings from moving into GIC.

The Trustees then recommended to the Selectmen and the Regional School Committee that they pursue with their employees more unified plan designs in order to ease the administrative issues facing the Trust.

The Trustees did not accept the Segal company's estimate of expected savings beyond plan design changes from shifting employees into the GIC. Consequently they recommended that neither the Selectmen nor the Regional School Committee attempt to shift employees into the GIC.

The Trustees did not recommend any goal for cost savings. This involved bargaining with employees and is beyond the Charter for the Trust and is the prerogative of the Town Manager and the Regional School Committee.

For the same reasons listed above, the Trust, as an entity, will not be involved in the proposed informal discussions.

Individually some Trustees are employed by the town and schools and others are members of the Selectmen, Regional School Committee and the Finance Committee. In these capacities some of these individuals will participate in the informal discussions and others may.

As the discussions of health insurance changes evolve there may be a need for additional data collection and analysis. If asked, the Trust stands ready to do what it can to assist in the production and analysis of the required information.

Bob Evans
Chair, Acton Health Insurance Trust