

**ACTON PUBLIC AND ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES (approved 12/6/12)**

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

**November 1, 2012
7:30 p.m. Joint School Committee
followed by AB Regional School Committee Meeting
followed by ABRSC Executive Session**

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’ Sullivan
Members Absent: None
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Xuan Kong and the Acton Public School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Kim McOsker at 7:35 p.m.

CHAIRMAN’S INTRODUCTION

The Acton-Boxborough Student Activities Fund (ABSASF) presented the School Committee with a donation of \$54,945. It was noted that 21 students are on the ABSAF Board. Brigid Bieber moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to accept the ABSAF donation with gratitude

STATEMENT of WARRANT

AB Warrant #13-010 dated 11/1/12 in the amount of \$2,065,004.12 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.
APS Warrant #201309 dated 10/30/12 in the amount of \$159,480.16 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL of MINUTES

Minutes of the 10/4/12 Joint/AB/APS School Committee meeting will be considered at the next meeting. The minutes of the 10/10/12 Joint AB/APS School Committee and Regional School District Study Committee meeting were approved with Kim McOsker and Dennis Bruce abstaining from the ABRSC and APSC votes. Minutes of the 10/16/12 Joint Acton Boards meeting were approved with Mary Brolin, Brigid Bieber and Dennis Bruce abstaining from the ABRSC vote and Dennis Bruce abstaining from the APSC vote.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

5.1 Student Enrollment Projections Report – Mary Ann and Peter Ashton, *Innovation & Information Consultants, Inc.*

5.1.1 Oct 1, 2012 APS/ABRSD Enrollment

Mary Ann Ashton presented the report. Enrollment this year is down for Acton and Boxborough elementary schools, and up slightly from last year at the Region. Two more Acton students attend APS than projected last year. Eleven more Acton students attend the Region than projected. Blanchard had 25 fewer students than projected last year. Boxborough sent 19 fewer students to the Region than projected. The number of single family building permits in Acton has declined for the last several years with a slight increase in the last two years. Boxborough housing permits have declined since 2002. Acton and Boxborough births has been declining since 2002, reflecting a demographic trend. Birth projections will be revisited once information from the 2010 census is

available. Total Acton enrollment is projected to drop 453 students over the next five years (9.5% decline). Boxborough enrollment is projected to drop 202 students (22%) over the same period.

Mary Ann was asked to comment on large building permits. That analysis has not been updated in two years. She also spoke with Nancy Tavernier about affordable building projects. The figures for 40Bs with residence in 2010 had .41 children in each unit. Statewide it is approximately .3, so Acton is a little higher than average. A single family home in Acton is .9. The Ashtons will collect the updated data and share it with the Committee.

5.2 Acton BOS Report

Paul Murphy reported on the League of Women Voters Forum on Regionalization on 10/30.

5.3 Acton FinCom Report

Xuan referred to the Acton FinCom Point of View (POV) emphasizing that it is a living document and Fincom asked for feedback from the boards. He asked for School Committee input in time to communicate back to Fincom. One committee member stated that the expense assumptions appeared logical, but the revenue side did not. Clarification would be helpful. John Petersen spoke from the public stating that there has been a lot of confusion about exactly what reserves are. He said that when budgeting for next year using \$1.5 M of reserves, the net use of reserves will actually be lower than that.

5.4 Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Report

HIT met on Oct 20. Kim McOsker reported that for the last several years, the percentage rates have been lower but that will not be the case next year. For planning purposes, 6% would be great but they will see.

5.5 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Report

Kim and Xuan asked for input to ALG on Revenue Assumptions; Split Allocation; Override/No Override. Kim emphasized that the School Committees should work toward school and town working together, not separately. Kim and Xuan reported back to ALG that Don Aicardi's revenue assumptions are reasonable. As enrollment shifts, the numbers will need to be reconsidered.

5.6 Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Report

Maria Neyland reported that BLF devoted a lot of time to discussing regionalization.

5.7 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis Bruce reported that the Task Force will have a conference call with the actuary next week. They are trying to find a number that is appropriate to fund and how to fund it. They are trying to determine how to bring the numbers down. The last calculation was \$7 million. They are working to finish their report to ALG in December.

Mike Coppolino asked once the money is in the trust account, if a dire need comes up, could the money be used that for an emergency. Dennis said that it could, contrary to the original answer (that it could not be taken out for other purposes). Kim said that it could be used for retirees' health insurance, but not other things. Brigid Bieber asked an employee benefit cost question. Some companies have started using life insurance as a way to offset future costs. She wondered if this is viable in the public section as a possible way to help fund these costs. Dennis will ask about it. There are many ideas on the table for ways to fund this massive liability.

5.8 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update

5.8.2 Draft Position Statement from APS/BPS/ABRSC Chairs - *Possible VOTE*

Xuan reported on the LWV Forum held on 10/30/12. Approximately 50 people attended from both Acton and Boxborough. Excellent questions came up that the Study Committee will

consider. Outreach subcommittee meets tomorrow and another subgroup is working on the Long Range Plan. The goal is to have a proposed Revised Agreement by the end of January that would be brought before the School Committees. It has to be sent to the DESE before the Special Town Meetings expected to be April 29, 2013. The RSDSC is waiting to hear about the grant that was written.

Outreach will be done to students about regionalization. Xuan asked the student reps to help with this. Nikhil Manocha said his political science class has been talking about this. He suggested doing a survey using the students' abschools emails.

John Petersen spoke from the audience asking about how costs will be allocated to the two towns. He asked if a differential tax rate had ever been considered in Acton or Boxborough for families with school children and those without. At the Forum he was told it had not been considered. John suggested that this might be considered, given that Boxborough could be paying 13% in the future due to their decreasing student enrollment. Brigid noted that in the current Agreement, as well as presumably in the future, it says the agreement should be reviewed every 5 years and at that time changes could be considered. Any change will be gradual and discussions should be had along the way. Several members agreed that John's point was interesting. Brigid emphasized that it is the job of the School Committees to look at all of the numbers and be aware when something is happening. The 3 year rolling average is used to avoid drastic changes.

The Committees discussed the proposed position statement, which was done with input from the two Superintendents. Concern was expressed that the statements don't really answer many of the questions that people are asking. Maria Neyland stated that the current School Committees cannot tie the hands/vote of future committees by making decisions now on some of these issues. They had to be vague on some of the questions. It was noted that negotiation issues cannot be changed by a school committee. Xuan emphasized that the memo does not provide guarantees, just thoughts so parents will have less uncertainty. Brigid will add an introductory paragraph to the memo explaining this. Clarification was requested for Item #5 regarding students who receive special education services and how they choose a school. Additional input on the memo should be sent to the local School Committee chair.

5.9 Preliminary 2013-2014 School Calendar – **FIRST READING**

5.9.1 & 2 Proposed Calendars starting before/after Labor Day, with possible March Professional Development Day

Dr. Mills began saying this would be the First Reading of next year's school calendar and it was hoped that a final discussion and vote would be taken at the 12/6/12 School Committee meeting. The religious holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday were not included as "no school" days on the two proposed FY14 calendars because he thought that was the sense of the Committee when they last discussed the issue in June. (Yom Kippur is on a Saturday this year.) He stated that he recommends starting before Labor Day because he believes that the students are fresh in late August and there are 3 more days of instruction before tests like MCAS and AP exams.

The Town of Acton has asked if the High School Field House could be used as a voting place next year. School administrators agree that school and voting could not take place at the same time in the High School. This is the reason for the March 26, 2014 local election day off for students and a much needed Professional Development Day for staff, so the High School could be used for voting if that decision was made. Mary Ann Ashton spoke from the audience saying that the League of Women Voters is investigating this issue and will be conducting interviews with the user groups. They hope to have information gathered by the beginning of December to give to the Acton Board of Selectmen.

Student Rep Nikhil Manocha said that many of the students need the religious holidays off to observe them, and they provide a nice break for the freshmen to alleviate stress. Regarding the

Before/After Labor Day start, he felt the longer students go into the summer, the more they lose focus. More study is also needed for things like the AP exams. Student Rep Jacob Johnson stated that it is not fair to give preference to one or two religions but it is tough to celebrate them when there is school. He advocated for starting before Labor Day because of AP classes and the need for more study time. He asked if the local election could be held the same day as the presidential election in Acton. Xuan suggested that he ask the Board of Selectmen that question.

Deanne O'Sullivan said that she joined School Committee because she felt the community was not being listened to enough. She advocated for keeping the Jewish holidays as no school, comparing it to not giving the Christmas break off. She supports starting before Labor Day because it gives kids time to settle in to school.

Maria Neyland stressed that if the High School has to be closed to vote, that could mean election days in September, November and March. She asked, "How do we close on a calendar with the election place not settled?". Dr. Mills said that perhaps schools could have a late start on voting days although Dr. Callen, Principal of the High School does not like this. Dr. Mills highly recommends voting a calendar in December because many people make their plans early.

Mike Coppelino suggested that the Committee solicit opinions of staff and the public about the religious holidays and starting before/after Labor Day because that is who the Committees serve. He said the schedule needs to reflect the needs of the community. He advocated for using data to support or refute decisions. Xuan said that last spring, the Committees had a serious discussion about the calendar and received a position statement from the Superintendent. Xuan reminded the Committee about the need to think clearly and carefully about each decision that they make and what the reason is to go back and revisit a decision.

Rabbi Lewis Mintz spoke from the audience. He introduced himself as a resident of Acton for 25 years and leader of the local synagogue for the past 30 years. He thought this discussion was going to take place on November 15th, so regretted that he could not prepare or inform his community. The Rabbi asked the School Committees to reconsider having school on the two Jewish holidays and Good Friday. He asked that they consider the nature of the observance and that the first day of Rosh Hashanah involves a lot of family time. He feels very strongly that the issue should not be that one holiday is more important than another, but it should be the nature of how the holiday is observed. People often leave town to be with family so many students and faculty will not be in school. He also asked the Committees to consider how the holidays impact school attendance, reminding them that they will be competing for substitutes with other school systems as well. Lastly, if the Committees decide to have school on the religious holidays, the Rabbi urged members to review the policy regarding students who do not attend school on their religious holiday, and be sure that the staff understands and abides by that policy.

Mike Coppelino stated that he was not at the meeting last spring when this was discussed and he would have voiced his opinion about this issue then.

Xuan stated that the Committees need to make a decision that is informed by community input, but not dictated by it. They must make sure that the Superintendent lets the School Committees know under what circumstances he can run the school. The issue will be revisited on Dec 6th and the public is welcome to come and provide input via email or by attending the meeting, as always.

Kim reminded the Committees that the conversation in the spring was about whether the Superintendent could you run the schools on these three religious holidays. At that time, Dr. Mills said that he could run school on those days. The Committees discussed whether or not to survey the public and decided to ask the principals to ask their families to send feedback to the School Committees before the 12/6/12 School Committee meeting.

5.10 FY13 SMART Goals/School Improvement Plan

Dr. Mills continued the discussion of his SMART goals for FY13 that began at the 10/4/12 meeting. He believes that the goals are as quantifiable and measurable as possible. When asked if goal 4B (supporting School Committee in negotiation of employee contracts) was necessary, it was agreed that due to its importance, it should be included.

Regarding goal 2, Dr. Mills has hired Futures Education to do an audit of special education services at the Region to see if there are efficiencies that can be used to build another special education program at the High School. The goal is not to cut special education services. When asked if special education is the only program that should be reviewed like this, Dr. Mills replied that he hopes that his staff reviews programs and costs all the time. A Futures audit of APS will be done next year.

If Futures concludes that there are no cost savings to be found, Dr. Mills said that this goal may not be achieved. The program at the High School is needed and will move forward with money from somewhere else. Nancy Sherburne spoke as the SpedPAC co-chair. She appreciates the effort to fund Bridges at the High School, as long as money can be found this way without cutting services. SpedPAC wants to see a goal that the achievement gap be closed per Deborah Bookis' presentation at the last meeting. They believe it will take a concrete plan of action to close this gap and would like to see it as a district goal. She respectfully requested that goal 2 be enhanced, and referred to an MCAS Report that Nancy sent the Committee today.

Mike Coppelino feels the measurable outcomes are not quantifiable. Mary Brolin commented that there are a lot of measurable goals, but many are yes/no. She understands that these are annual goals and said care should be taken setting goals beyond that when testing and other things can change each year. John Petersen spoke from the audience saying that goal 4 is a compliance objective, and it should be an evaluation objective. In his opinion, students have an opportunity far beyond anyone else to evaluate staff. Consequently, he advocated for including this input in an appropriate way.

Xuan said that the Committees could accept the SMART goals as presented, or ask for changes. Maria advocated for voting, but would like to see appropriate student evaluation input included at a later time.

ABRSC VOTE:

Maria Neyland moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was,

VOTED: to accept the SMART Goals as written

(YES: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Michael Coppelino, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan NO: Dennis Bruce, Paul Murphy ABSTAINED: Xuan Kong)

APSC VOTE:

Mike Coppelino moved, Deanne O'Sullivan seconded and it was,

VOTED: to accept the SMART Goals as written

(YES: Michael Coppelino, Kim McOsker, Deanne O'Sullivan NO: Dennis Bruce, Paul Murphy ABSTAINED: Xuan Kong)

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 9:59 p.m. ABRSC continued.

ABRSC BUSINESS

6.1 Quarter 1 ABRSD Financial Report

Don Aicardi reported that the ABRSD ended the first quarter of FY13 with a \$151,107 projected year end fund balance. The complexity of the athletic budget, including that actual expenses straddle two different financial entities (special revenue and ABRSD general fund) will be discussed at a future meeting. Only interest will be paid on the Lower Fields expenses this year. Principal payments will start in FY14.

Dennis confirmed that a full accounting of the revolving accounts will be presented at the 12/6/12 meeting. When asked, Dr. Mills said he thought the Lower Fields updates would be quarterly and that would happen in January. Maria Neyland asked for an update on the person hired for corporate sponsorship last year. In the future, Don will add a line to the memo referencing the attached budget status report.

6.2 Long Range Financial Planning

Don Aicardi presented his Long Range Financial Model FY14 to FY18, looking at what the annual rate of increase in actual spending has been including outside funding sources. Using FY07 as the base, Appropriated Budgets have increased on average from FY08 to FY13 by 3.3% and using FY10 as the base, Appropriated Budgets have increased on average from FY10 to FY13 by 2.0%. This model is an educated guess on what MAY happen by providing insights into the challenges of the budget drivers/assumptions. Budgets will be difficult after the next year, but then could be a little better.

Brigid thanked Don for a great presentation looking back and projecting forward. She noted how tight the budget has been kept at the Region over the years. She does not want to lose sight of the Long Range Strategic Plan and the work and focus that went into that document. Xuan echoed what Dr. Mills said about how difficult it is to predict what will happen with negotiations.

Mary Ann Ashton stated that an early POV from Fincom shows that there are differences in assumptions that Don made in various line items. She asked the School Committee what their intent is and what response she should take back to Fincom. Xuan said that the sense is that Don's projections are closer to what the School Administration believes will happen so Xuan would ask FinCom to consider them as a better educated guess to what the POV is based on. He hopes the two groups can converge to more similar numbers in the future. Dr. Mills agreed with Xuan and stated that he sees the differences particularly in special education services.

Xuan said that the School Committee owes it to the Acton and Boxborough Boards of Selectmen to give them as good an estimate of what the school districts should use. Brigid said she is confident in Don's numbers.

6.3 Establishing OPEB Trust (to be Voted at 12/6/12 meeting)

As Treasurer, Tess Summers has selected an investment company for this new account. The Committee was asked to carefully read the draft and be prepared to discuss and vote on it on 12/6/12. It will be interesting to see what the Board of Advisors would be. Questions should be sent to Don. Maria Neyland was asked to share this information with the Boxborough FinCom and Xuan asked Mary Ann Ashton to share it with the Acton Fincom.

6.4 AB Debt Restructuring Letter

Don Aicardi thanked Tim Harrison, the Schools' outside auditor, for suggesting that we pay off some of our debt. He is not recommending that we refinance at this time, but this should be considered in the future. Don will continue to run the numbers.

6.5 Recommendation to Accept Gift to ABRHS Student Activity ASHA

Mike Coppolino moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept this gift to ASHA

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- 7.3 ABUW Community Forum: Chris Herren, former Celtics Basketball player, talks candidly about the substance abuse problems which derailed his professional career. Sober since 2008, Herren is an inspirational speaker, especially reaching out to teens. Wednesday

1/9/13, 7:00 pm, ABRHS – Dr. Mills highlighted this event as an important one for the community to consider attending.

AB EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 10:49 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to litigation.

(YES – Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O’Sullivan)

Xuan Kong declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session for the sole purpose of adjourning.

At 10:55 p.m., the Committee was polled and voted to go out of Executive Session for the sole purpose of adjourning.

NEXT MEETINGS

- November 15, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library, Education Report: Lynne Newman, Principal of Gates School
- December 6, 7:30 pm, ABRSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda