

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes (approved 1/17/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 20, 2012
7:00 p.m. APS SC Meeting

Members Present: Dennis Bruce, Mike Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy,
Deanne O'Sullivan
Members Absent: none
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

Chairperson Kim McOsker called the Acton Public School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Gates School Chorus opened the meeting with some wonderful holiday songs. Director Kim Ward thanked the School Committee and Dr. Mills for expanding the specialists' positions this year and emphasized how it has helped the programs. She said, "As a music teacher, this is so important because the voice we are born with is the instrument that we are given, and it allows you to take place in many activities as an adult by singing as well as listening."

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

APS warrant #201312 dated 12/11/12 in the amount of \$106,474.70 was signed by the Chairman and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the 11/15/12 APS Meeting were approved as amended.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.0 Security Measures in Place in our Schools / Moment of Silence

Dr. Mills asked for a moment of silence in memory of the victims of last Friday's tragic shooting in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. He read a statement acknowledging the pain and disbelief that everyone is experiencing and emphasized that there are "extensive thoughts, plans and actions in place to assure, as best we can, in a national culture of gun violence, the safety of everyone that comes into our school buildings." He will convene and chair a task force to review all of our safety procedures and make recommendations as needed for change. He expects most of the recommendations will be to reaffirm what is now done on a daily basis. He will report these findings to the School Committee in late February or March. He concluded that what the staff did at Sandy Hook, "...is nothing short of inspirational and courageous, yet any teacher would do it. That is what we do.... We will always remember them and forever be proud."

Kim McOsker echoed the Superintendent's comments. Several committee members commented on whether school doors should be locked. One said that locking down the schools is not the answer because our culture involves so much parental involvement and openness. Another stated that Boxborough locks their doors successfully and it adds precious time to stop an incident from moving further. The committee agreed that there were many issues for the task force to consider.

Stating that "something needed to be done", Michael Coppolino moved that:

“the Acton Public School Committee draft a letter that will be sent to our State and U.S. Senators and Representatives, as well as MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees), EDCO Collaborative, CASE (Concord Area Special Education) Collaborative and all other bodies which may be of influence, encouraging all parties to support any pending legislation or draft a new bill, demanding the immediate cessation of the sale of all assault weapons, through gun shops, gun shows or any other outlets.”

Xuan seconded the motion and stated that this cannot be all that the Committee does. Other members agreed. Mike said that gun violence is happening at the national level, but he envisioned a groundswell, even from little towns like Acton, that might catch the ears of our legislators and groups like MASC, etc. If all agreed and voiced their opinion, it may trickle through the nation and lead to some kind of change.

The motion was unanimously,
VOTED and approved.

Mike will draft the letter for School Committee review and approval at the next meeting.

6.1 ALG Update

Xuan reported on the meeting of 12/13/12. Everyone is looking for more solid numbers in January. Currently, there is a deficit for FY14 of \$1.5 million. FinCom will send a letter to APS SC with their questions about regionalization. The OPEB working group was thanked for their efforts. It was agreed that reserves would be discussed once the budgets are out in January.

6.2 Board of Selectmen and FinCom Update

Paul Murphy reported that the BOS has presented their budget. A letter given to School Committee members at the meeting from the FinCom summarizes FinCom’s opinion. They have spent much time discussing regionalization and particularly request more detail about educational benefits and financial models for cost savings. Kim McOsker will draft a response and Dr. Mills and Xuan will review. A full discussion of the letter will take place at the 1/17/13 APSC meeting. If members have thoughts to add to the draft they will send them to Kim.

6.3 Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Update

Kim reported that there was a brief meeting that morning (12/20/12). Rates seem like they’ll be 9 or 10%.

6.4 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis Bruce reported that there has not been a meeting recently. A somewhat final report is done but the task force is waiting for state recommendations to be made to the Governor before finalizing. These are expected in the next few days. Although the task force was initiated by ALG, the group that each person represents is expected to take the lead of sharing the information with their own group. When Dennis asked if the Committee wanted an OPEB presentation at Budget Saturday or at the SC meetings prior to 1/26/13, Xuan replied that a presentation could be done whenever it is ready. Dennis: would like to have the state information and the task force’s report before presenting. A recommendation will be made to ALG. Xuan emphasized while that is correct, ALG is not a group but representatives of each group, so it would be better to present to each group. It was agreed that the timing will depend on when all information is received.

6.5 APS FY14 Budget Overview

Don Aicardi presented the APS Overview, stressing that details will be provided in January. When asked why \$108,000 for additional assistants’ time was added in a “level service” budget, Don replied that items that have been agreed to ahead of time were included. This is the third year of the agreement to add assistant hours. The school psychologist was added last year so it is also included in the new base. Xuan and Mike discussed slide 6 regarding reserve use and comparing actual net use for FY11, 12 and 13. A comment was made that ALG every year grossly underestimates the regeneration of the turnbacks at year end. Don disagreed and feels compelled to insist that there is a balanced discussion of reserves.

Many different factors go into reserves and schools cannot deficit spend. Many financial items are out of the schools' control and a cushion must be built in to some degree as a result.

John Petersen spoke from the audience advocating for reserves to be 1% of the budget. He also asked how OPEB would be reflected in the APS FY14 budget. Don's impression is that OPEB will be a separate warrant article at Acton Town Meeting for the town budget. Kim said the OPEB liability for APS being handled by the Town and Town Manager as a capital expense, not an operating expense, should be brought up at the next ALG meeting.

6.6 APS Review of Special Revenue Accounts

Don presented with a focus on the revolving and gift funds. As a result of Tom Blondin's redesign of a tracking document, Don can provide reports much more easily when asked about revolving accounts. The interconnectivity between these funds and the APS general operating budget is important to understand.

6.7 Regionalization (RSDSC) Update

Xuan Kong reported that the Chairs of the RSDSC feel that the School Committees need to begin to take ownership of the Regionalization vote/decision, now that the RSDSC's goal, a new Regional Agreement to propose, is close to being achieved. Ultimately the real benefits have to come from within the School Committee and the leadership of the future administration. It is critical that the School Committee take the initiative on the very important question about what are the educational benefits. Dr. Mills and Deb Bookis will draft a detailed statement about how education will benefit from regionalization for both towns.

John Petersen submitted an email outlining school building utilization in Acton and Boxborough to be considered for the facilities planning process. He also did an analysis of the ABRSD budget (Table 6 FY94 to FY13) to see how the regional budget behaves so the School Committee could see how it changes for an enrollment based assessment formula. Although he is a huge supporter of regionalization, he believes that an enrollment based formula (what is currently used) is not right, and is not good for students or education, because it provides a lower Boxborough assessment than an EQV formula (Equalized Valuation Program, based on taxable property for a town) would going forward. This is due to Boxborough's decreasing enrollment and will result in a significant assessment shift from Boxborough to Acton taxpayers, according to John. He concluded that historically, 80% of the costs have been born by Acton and 20% by Boxborough. Consequently, a shift in enrollment will affect Acton 80% and Boxborough 20%.

6.8 Proposed 2013-2014 APS School Calendar

The ABRSC voted a calendar on 12/6/12 and Dr. Mills advocated for the APSC to approve the same calendar, despite the Committee's tie vote at the same meeting.

Kim McOsker stated that she was against the proposed calendars on 12/6/12 because she wanted school to start after Labor Day. She said that 2500 elementary age children are not worried about AP exams and the need to have more classes before they are given in the spring. She asked the Committee to consider starting after Labor Day for FY15. She stated that because she has knowledge now that would change her vote, she would like the Committee to vote again on the calendar.

Xuan moved, Mike seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that the Acton Public School reconsider their vote on the FY14 calendar.

Dennis Bruce stated that some people felt the calendar discussion took place "behind the scenes" but he emphasized that the discussion and vote takes place every year, clearly on the posted agenda. He asked that serious consideration be given to starting after Labor Day for FY15, to maximize family time.

Paul moved and Mike seconded the motion:

"that the APSC approve FY14 Calendar B (start before Labor Day and have no school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday)"

Xuan stated that he would abstain because Jacob Johnson, ABRSC student rep, summarized his rationale at the 12/6/12 meeting. Jacob said the issue is not about religious holidays. It is about whether or not the students have too much of a burden if they miss a day of school. Xuan feels this is a great opportunity for the Committees to look at why students feel such a cost of not being in school. Regarding starting before/after Labor Day, Xuan said there was a clear directive to the Superintendent to propose a calendar that he recommends educationally, and the School Committee opposed it. Xuan does not feel that he can support Calendar B but will not stand in the way since Dr. Mills has changed his mind.

The motion to approve FY14 Calendar B was **VOTED**: YES: Dennis Bruce, Mike Coppolino, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, Deanne O'Sullivan ABSTAINED: Xuan Kong

6.9 Recommendation to Approve Gifts from the Friends of the Acton Libraries

Mike moved, Paul seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept with gratitude a gift of \$11,500 from the Friends of the Acton Libraries for the elementary schools' libraries.

6.10 Recommendation to Approve Grant from IBM to Merriam School

Xuan moved, Mike seconded, and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept with gratitude a grant of \$1500 from IBM to the Merriam School
These funds will subsidize the Reader's Notebook program.

6.11 School Wellness Advisory Committee Update

Kim McOsker reported that she attended the first meeting on 12/19/12. The first plan of action is to develop a "use" assessment They will develop a survey regarding health/wellness/nutrition and are particularly interested in students' opinions. Many members are from the Wellness Task Force that met from 2007-2009. Mike and Kim are members but it may make sense for one of the policy members to do it instead of Kim. Deanne O'Sullivan offered to do this.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.4 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 important upcoming event.

Xuan thanked Liza Huber for the Preschool Enrollment Report. Liza does not expect to have to ask for more resources for this year. She reminded the Committee to subtract out the itinerant populations when looking at the report because those students are attending local preschools and out of district.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- TUESDAY, January 8, 7:30 p.m. in the RJGJHS Library, ABRSC Meeting (Tuesday meeting due to returning from the holiday break the week before)
- January 17, 7:00 p.m. in the RJGJHS Library, APSC Meeting
- SATURDAY, January 26, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm, in the RJGJHS Library, Joint SC Budget Meetings
- April 29, 7:00 p.m. Special Town Meetings in Acton and Boxborough regarding Regionalization

The Committee adjourned at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda