

**ACTON-BOXBOROUGH TRANSITIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABTSC)**  
**MEETING Minutes** (approved 3/6/14)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

Wednesday, February 12, 2014  
7:00 p.m. ABTSC Executive Session  
7:15 p.m. ABTSC Business Meeting

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

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The Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Maria Neyland.

**ABTSC Executive Session**

At 7:02 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously **VOTED** by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee** go into Executive Session to discuss strategy in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel. (YES – Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O’Sullivan, Rychlik) Maria Neyland declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session.

The ABTSC was polled to go out of Executive Session at 7:16 p.m.

**ABTSC Business Meeting**

**1. Public Participation**

Allen Nitschelm asked Liza Huber about cost parameters following Budget Saturday’s discussion of needed special education supports. He asked about the possibility of reimbursements and direct payments from students’ insurance and fees to cover some expenses, as is done with sports. Liza responded that unlike athletics, students with clearly identified special education needs are all funding and regulatory requirements from a federal mandate. Sports are an option, not a required element, of a free and appropriate education. Special education students go through a rigorous qualification process before they are given services. Many parents do seek out their health insurance for coverage. Allen clarified that he was asking a “social services question, not just a special education question”. Allen’s questions will be addressed at the next meeting.

Kim McOsker read the following statement:

*“I watched the video of the February 3rd Acton Board of Selectmen meeting and am very concerned about 2 comments, one made by Janet Adachi and the other by Mike Gowing related to attending ALG. During a discussion centered on the next ALG meeting, Janet states "there are going to be some dead bodies at that meeting one day" and later someone asks Mike what he wants to bring to ALG and he states ‘a gun’.*

*We live in a time now where these are not flippant remarks to be ignored. Sandy Hook was only a year ago and each week we seem to hear of tragedies from violent acts in schools and public centers.*

*I have had a good discussion with the Town Manager and did hear today from Janet regarding the incident. But it is still very troubling and I think we all should expect civility from our elected officials especially those with whom I serve on other committees.” Kim was thanked and there was consensus that this type of behavior is inappropriate from our elected officials.*

## **2. Recommendation to Approve Superintendent Contract**

The Committee reviewed the proposed contract effective July 1, 2014. It includes a starting salary of \$180,000, followed by a 3% increase in FY16 and a 4% increase in FY17 if Mr. Brand’s annual evaluations are “proficient” or better. Although signed by Mr. Brand, it was not signed by the School Committee Chair.

Brigid Bieber moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously

**VOTED:** to approve the Superintendent’s contract as proposed.

## **3. FY15 Budget Discussion**

1. Presentation slides
2. Revised Table of Assessments (Table 6)
3. Possible Recommendation to Approve FY15 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District (ABRSD) Budget and Assessments – **VOTE**

Steve Mills presented a revised budget proposal of \$76,181,500 compared to \$76,938,226 on 2/6/14, a reduction of \$756,726. Acton’s assessment would increase 4.78% and Boxborough’s would decrease 6.25%. He encouraged the Committee to look at the budget as a whole, knowing that it is not the budget he would like to see, but that it is sound.

Steve met recently with Peter and Mary Ann Ashton about how complicated it is to compare the two years to each other (slide 5). Caution was expressed about confusing the budget increase with the assessment increase. The 4.78% increase is under 5% which is what the School Committee asked him to do at the last meeting on 2/6/14. Steve noted that there are some possible areas of improvement, including the CASE and Middlesex assessments and circuitbreaker. Steve will introduce a motion at the next CASE meeting to reduce the surplus that CASE is holding.

Brigid stated that although she doesn’t like this budget because it is not level service, she understands that one that will pass at both Town Meetings is needed, so she will support it. Deanne expressed concern about the special education services for next year with the elimination of the addition of a grade 6-8 special education coordinator. She advocated for removing the third custodian so the coordinator could stay in the budget. Mary Brolin agreed that this isn’t the budget she wants for the students, but it needs to be supported by the towns so she will agree to it. She referred to the realignment slide, stating that these cuts need to go on the left half of the slide. There will be a conversation about how much efficiency savings would come from Boxborough and Mary said that there should be a talk with the two Finance committees about that.

Paul expressed frustration that the additional special education support has been eliminated and emphasized the cost of out of districts placements when students cannot be educated in our schools. He advocated for giving up the additional assistant support in order to keep the special education coordinator that was in the original budget. Kim appreciated the effort to bring the number down and hopes that it can “reboot” the discussion at ALG. Mike thanked the Boxborough members for understanding Acton’s financial situation, and Steve and the staff for relooking at the line items.

Dennis talked about the range of emotions for Committee members since the superintendent interviews, Budget Saturday, and all of the meetings and discussions that have taken place recently. He was extremely appreciative that the staff spent the time to review all of the numbers and issues since last week’s meeting. Maria urged the Committee to look at the budget and regionalization issues as a one year piece of a longer project. She reminded them that decisions

need to be measured, and everything cannot be done right away. She gave the example of the one-tier transportation system that was studied, then put on hold, and can be returned to when appropriate.

Deanne felt that the public was told that special education services would benefit from regionalization. She was struggling because services have been cut at Blanchard. She asked for a list of what Boxborough has before regionalization and what they will have in FY15. Steve Mills referred to a slide from Budget Saturday showing that there is “a lot” coming out of one school, even with declining enrollment. Steve said he would provide this information for the Committee.

Kristina stated the need to communicate more clearly and earlier in the process with all of the town boards.

Nancy Sherburne spoke from the audience saying that she is deeply disappointed with the budget being proposed, calling it “very difficult if not impossible to support”. She feels it does not provide basic service needs to a certain group of students and it still requires young children to switch schools mid elementary years. Regarding the elimination of the proposed coordinator, Nancy said that Lynne Laramie is “grossly overburdened” being responsible for five schools now and adding Blanchard increases her workload by 20%. She noted that FUTURES evaluated our special education programming and services and they said we are very efficient and leaner than they would recommend. The CASE assessment change creates a huge increase but it has nothing to do with regionalization. She advocated for the special education coordinator being placed above the Assistant Principal line in the budget because items that have the most direct impact on student outcomes should be the highest priority. Nancy said that the commitment to this coordinator was made in the last budget cycle and she thought it would be funded for FY15.

Bill Guthlein spoke from the audience also advocating for the special education coordinator. Dr. Mills stated that Lynne Laramie does need support and he would consider adding some of it if more funds come in. He gave the examples of adding mental health professionals at the High School, adding the Bridges Program, and adding assistant elementary principals as how the schools serve our special education students well. He wanted the coordinator in the budget, but together the staff prioritized and put this position on the cut list.

John Petersen spoke from the audience stating that the Budget Saturday slide showing our schools’ historical per pupil spending is painful to everyone. The budgets, however, have to be crafted using those painful numbers, because that is the amount of money available. The allocation issue is the Superintendent and staff’s responsibility. John stated that the tax base in Acton and Boxborough cannot support a 5 or 6% increase to the towns, calling it “not sustainable or survivable”. He urged the School Committee to reject this budget because it is too high.

Katie Green spoke from the audience, not speaking for the Acton Selectmen. She talked about the unmet financial needs on the town side as well, including new firefighters and police officers. She asked the Superintendent if the proposed budget is sustainable without an override over the next couple of years. He responded that to use 2 or 3 million dollars a year from reserves, it is sustainable without the need for an override. Katie disagreed with using reserves through 2017.

Allen Nitschelm spoke from the audience asking for a 2 or 3 year forward budget projection to know about sustainability. Mary Brolin mentioned the Boxborough efficiencies and explained the \$1,067,051 (“FY15 shift”) found on Table 6 which comes from Appendix A in the new Regional Agreement. Mary’s comment about efficiencies and savings is not part of Appendix A. These savings are an 83-17 split that go into the budget in that fashion. Allen is talking about the promise to taxpayers that 80% of savings would flow to Acton. Mary stated that all of the savings goes through the budget and are part of the School Committee’s discussion.

Dennis Bruce moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015 be set at \$76,181,499 and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:  
Acton \$49,836,594 Boxborough \$10,625,802, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$13,714,944, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$67,707, Anticipated Regional Bonus Aid in the amount of \$139,000, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$1,296,794, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$500,000, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

Mike Coppolino asked if the Boston College professors could present their findings of the Demographic Survey results at the March School Committee meeting. The Committee agreed.

The Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee adjourned at 8:54 p.m.  
*(This meeting replaced the APSC meeting originally scheduled for 2/13/14.)*

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda