

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
Minutes (approved 9/17/15)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

September 3, 2015  
7:00 p.m.

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*Members Present:* Diane Baum, Mary Brolin, Michael Coppolino, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Kristina Rychlik  
*Members Absent:* Brigid Bieber, Amy Krishnamurthy, Deanne O'Sullivan  
*Others:* Marie Altieri, Bonnie Bisbicos, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr

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The ABRSC was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Kristina Rychlik, Chairperson.

**1. Chairman's Introduction**

- 1.1. First Day of School – Glenn Brand reported that the buildings are in terrific shape thanks to our custodial staff and everyone got off to a good start. Staff began on Monday with a building based first day of professional development, then again on Tuesday for the kick off in the High School Auditorium, followed by respective meetings.
- 1.2. Dr. Brand introduced Dr. Tom Kingston, his new New Superintendent Induction Program Mentor/Coach. He looks forward to working with Dr. Kingston in this second year of the three year program.

**2. Statement of Warrant and Approval of Minutes**

- 2.1. Warrant #16-004 dated 8/20/15 in the amount of \$1,851,150.45 and #16-005 dated 9/3/15 in the amount of \$3,333,922.14 were signed by the Committee.
- 2.2. Minutes of the School Committee Workshop on 7/22/15 and meetings on 6/25/15 and 8/10/15 were approved as amended. Minutes of the meeting on 4/30/15 will be reviewed at the next meeting.

**3. Public Participation - none**

**4. FY16 Superintendent Goals – First Read - Glenn Brand**

Dr. Brand reviewed his proposed goals for the year. Mike Coppolino asked if the student learning goal (#3) should be more measurable regarding actual student achievement. Bill Guthlein asked if it could focus more on student learning. Mary Brolin referred to Goal #5 and asked what was meant by understanding the capital and building related needs “within the district and at the municipal/town level”. Dr. Brand said it referenced town access to campuses as a whole.

Kristina Rychlik liked the goals and asked the Superintendent how he planned to create the new Long Range Strategic Plan. Dr. Brand said that he has started with the District Leadership Team where they are focusing on the Entry Plan. This will involve the faculty and staff, followed by the community as a whole. He is committed to having a Plan that is achievable. He recognizes that some of the items in the Entry Plan do not need to be formalized in the Long Range Plan; he and his team will just do them. The school councils and PTOs will also be asked for input and feedback as the work unfolds. The School Committee will also be involved in the process. Some of the items in the current plan also showed up in the Entry Plan so they will be included. Dr. Brand feels the focus should be narrower than the current plan so it is doable.

These goals will be voted on at the next meeting.

**5. Central Office Restructuring Proposal - VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Currently the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and the Secretary to the School Committee are a shared position amounting to 1.0 FTE with responsibilities split approximately half time for each position. After a year as Superintendent, Dr. Brand firmly believes these roles are understaffed and has concerns that the ability to fully support the necessary functions for the School Committee and the Office of the Superintendent is being compromised. This is due to a combination of factors including: increased expectations for communication (email, newsletters, website, etc), increasing need to review and revise School Committee policies, and changes in the Public Records, Reporting and Open Meeting Laws. Dr. Brand proposed two changes: 1. The current Administrative Assistant /Secretary would transition to a new Executive Assistant to the School Committee (1.0 FTE) position, to be funded through reallocation of existing resources that fund the current split position. 2. A new Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and Director of Finance position (1.0) be created and funded with salary savings from several sources for FY16. It would then be in the proposed FY17 budget.

The School Committee is discussing this because they vote to appoint the Secretary to the School Committee. Dr. Brand stated that Framingham, Brookline and Lexington all have full time support for their School Committees. Mike Coppolino favored making this decision at the next meeting, as typically votes that involve funding are discussed at two meetings. He suggested that the position be part time at first to be sure there is enough work for a full time position. Mary Brolin asked that the position be reevaluated at the end of the year to ensure it needs to be full time next year. The Superintendent voiced concern about how the Central Office departments are being supported, given some of the piecemeal solutions that have been put in place over the years in an effort to control costs. It was suggested that the two town's Finance Committees be told about the proposal because it is outside of the budget process. A point was made that positions are added during the year (when new students move in, or special needs services are required, for example) and those are not discussed at this level. Mike Coppolino will survey some of the comparative communities (as described by Peter Ashton) to see how they handle this position (School Committee support) and their salary levels. Maria Neyland was in strong support of this proposal, given the year she was chairwoman. She reminded the Committee that they manage a \$76 million budget with many hours of meetings that need to be handled properly. Marie Altieri stated that the work of the School Committee has grown tremendously in recent years and that a Public Records Officer would soon be required. It was the sense of the Committee to make this decision at their next meeting. *(Beth Petr left the room for this discussion.)*

**6. Finance Department Update – Clare Jeannotte**

6.1. ABRSD Actuarial Valuation and Review of OPEB as of 12/31/14 Report, *Segal Consulting*  
Based on this report, there was an unfunded liability of \$40,269,801 on 12/31/14. Clare reported that a meeting was held with a representative from Segal to initially review the report. Mary Brolin attended. Steve Noone spoke from the Acton Finance Committee about the “normal cost”, the amount needed to put aside for your current employees’ future costs. A strategy has been to fund some percentage of the “normal cost”. He stated that this report is only slightly better than the last report from a few years ago.

6.2. Moody’s Bond Rating Review Report, issued on 8/21/15  
Moody’s assigned a “negative outlook” but affirmed the Aa2 rating due to limited financial flexibility resulting from three consecutive years of material fund balance declines. Clare Jeannotte reported that this has no impact on issued debt and Moody’s will look at the district again in 18 – 24 months. Several members expressed disappointment in this ratings report. The money is all within the district, but what moved to OPEB (a restricted account) does not get included in the Moody’s review. The Committee agreed that they must be strategic to look at all

of the pots of money and whether they are restricted or not, especially if the district plans to go for bonding in the future. Clare stated that Moody's was interested to know if we have a fund balance policy, which we do not. She said that the district has great practices but they are not memorialized in policies. Mary Brolin stated that Clare and her team's presentation and explanations may have convinced the representatives not to downgrade the district. In conclusion, Clare said that the budget subcommittee is reviewing all of this and creating a budget calendar with budget assumptions.

**7. Staffing and Enrollment Update – Marie Altieri**

- 7.1. 2015-2016 New Professional Staff (updated)
- 7.2. Agenda from Orientation held 8/26/15
- 7.3. 9/1/15 Enrollment Report
- 7.4. Update on Blanchard Kindergarten and Grade 1
  - 7.4.1. Letter sent to families

Marie Altieri reported that 33 teachers and 110 support staff have been hired with an average teacher salary of \$57,000 which is approximately a 5M level. Budgeting is done for 3M but 8 – 10 veteran teachers have left since the budget process and they have been replaced by lower level staff. New teacher orientation was last Wednesday. The district is now fully staffed for professional staff, with the exception of a couple of assistants.

There are several other areas of concern.

Boxborough has two Kindergarten sections and two 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade sections with just a few more students than can comfortably fit in those grades, but not enough for another full section. There are 24 students in each first grade and 22 in each second grade. The administration is trying to mitigate that, including sending a letter to parents. Some of the Kindergarten students are half day, so there are 23 students in the morning, but only 16 or 17 kids in the afternoon section of the day. Second and third grades are above the Class Size Guidelines and Marie and her staff are watching them. The home town guarantee has created some of these challenges. Regarding cross town attendance, 44 Acton children attend Blanchard and 24 children from Boxborough go to Acton. This helps the numbers but makes transportation complicated. Mike Coppolino asked about the additional full time staff and support staff. With 35 new staff added, he asked what the net was. Marie replied that she thinks it is flat because almost all new staff replaced people who left.

**8. Standardized Testing Update – Glenn Brand**

- 8.1. Citizens' Petition Sent to Acton Town Manager 8/13/15
- 8.2. Resolution Calling for a Moratorium on High-Stakes Standardized Tests, *Worcester School Committee*
- 8.3. Conditions and Considerations for a New Generation of Student Assessment in MA, Position Paper from the MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS)

Dr. Brand updated the committee. It was pointed out that Blanchard students and some of the Acton elementary students did take PARCC last year but they did not get results, so it is difficult to know if anything was learned from the experience. Mary Brolin and Mike Coppolino are very frustrated that the Common Core and PARCC/MCAS are being rolled together as both bad. Mike's biggest complaint is that the DESE is not being forthcoming with the data. He urged DESE to show the public the data and prove scientifically that PARCC is a good thing. He thinks the Common Core standards are fine.

Deb Bookis stated that the Common Core has been a good chance to reflect on our practice. She doesn't think we have issues with Common Core at this time because in Massachusetts, we don't

have the prescriptives that some states have. She mentioned House Bill 340 that is currently on the books for discussion by the Legislature. Kristina Rychlik reminded the Committee that Mr. Smyers emailed his petition and is open for feedback on it. A decision is being made soon if the Acton Special Town Meeting in November will happen. This obviously focuses on only one town in our District so it is an awkward position to be in.

9. **Recommendation to Approve Revisions to CASE Agreement – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Dr. Brand said that primarily the changes are to move the document in compliance with some requirements from DESE.

Diane Baum moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the revisions to the CASE Agreement as proposed.

10. **Recommendation to Approve First Amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Town of Boxborough – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

10.1. Draft Amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding (reviewed by ABRSD Counsel) Dr. Brand stated that both towns' counsels have reviewed the document. Kristina Rychlik asked why the district is just creating this amendment for Boxborough, but realized that when she compared the two MOUS, they are very different. The Committee asked why the hourly overtime rate is used. Clare Jeannotte explained that Boxborough staff would only work for the school district after their normal work hours, so this is correct. She said the same is true for Acton workers. We may or may not need to address this with an amendment with Acton.

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the Amendment to the MOU with Boxborough as proposed.

11. **Recommendation to Approve Letter of Support for Boxborough's MassWorks Grant for sidewalk extension along route 111 – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve this letter of support as proposed.

12. **Recommendation to Approve FY16 Calendar Late Start for ABRHS students not taking the PSAT on 10/14/15 – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

About 500 students participate in this testing. This year it will only be available to take during the school day. The Administration recommends it be taken on a school day. New England was the only place that did not administer the PSAT during a school day. This may be a one time trial.

Mike Coppolino asked if there are any alternatives that could be considered. He stated that looking at all of the delayed starts in a year, they really add up. There have had several conversations about other options. They also have to cancel classes during this time, so instruction would be missed if we don't do a late start. Mary Brolin mentioned that it is critical to have a good testing environment. She wondered if online classes could be considered for the kids who are not in school, possibly also during snow days.

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the recommendation as proposed.

13. **MASC District Governance Program Update – Kristina Rychlik**

13.1. Review of ABRSC 2015 - 2016 Operating Protocols – Second Read (*to be voted at Workshop on 9/10/15*) - Kristina Rychlik

Kristina included feedback from Paul Murphy and Diane Baum in this draft. Other committee members had no comments. Diane Baum asked about the Mission Statement and the point was made that the goal was to modify the operating protocols. Diane had just come from the EDCO School Committee member Orientation where they stressed that School Committee should focus on the

education of all students. Diane felt that this is not included in the mission statement, although “all students” is included in the third paragraph. Diane will forward more specific suggestions.

Workshop #2 will be Thursday night 9/10 with Dorothy Presser. Committee members were asked to think about how they can support Glenn’s goals prior to the meeting. (Mary Brodin cannot attend and Maria Neyland may not be able to.)

#### 14. **School Committee Member Reports**

##### 14.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Kristina Rychlik*

A 3 Board Meeting will be scheduled for the end of October. Beth will begin scheduling. Clare Jeannotte, Marie Altieri and Steve Barrett have been working hard on simplifying the spreadsheet.

##### 14.2. Minuteman Tech Update – *Diane Baum*

The Beacon reported that Vince Amoroso is now representing Boxborough on the Minuteman Tech School Committee. They are meeting on Sept 8.

#### 15. **Superintendent’s Report – Glenn Brand**

##### 15.1. Bus Pass/Transportation Update

315 permanent bus passes have been submitted for this year. 44 are Acton to Boxborough and 31 are Boxborough to Acton. This has created a lot of complexity for the transportation office.

##### 15.2. Memo: School Committee Liaisons for each School

Dr. Brand wants to bring this back to the School Committee to provide more connection with the schools. He hopes that School Committee members will volunteer to fill these roles. He prefers that liaisons not chose a school that they have a child at. Members voiced their preferences. Dr. Brand will assign accordingly.

Dr. Brand reported on a bus incident yesterday in Boxborough. Five students were on the bus but there were no injuries. He will review our protocols about how parents are contacted.

It was also reported that a wooden light pole fell on Leary Field due to its age and has been replaced. JD Head is looking into the integrity of the other poles. Mike Coppolino emphasized that Leary Field is used every day and this testing needs to be done immediately, or perhaps kids should be kept off of the area as a safety concern. Maria Neyland was there when it happened and agrees that it needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

#### 16. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

16.1. Principals’ Back to School Letters to Families - highlighted

16.2. Parent Communication Map - highlighted

16.3. Financial Difficulties Letter to Families - highlighted

16.4. ABSAF Support for FY16 Memo – highlighted by the Superintendent for their continued generous support of \$80,000 this year

16.5. ABRSD 2015-2016 Family Learning Series –highlighted – Deb Bookis was thanked for these exciting events/activities targeted to families. Flyers will be translated.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda