

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 1/11/18)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 14, 2017
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville (7:05 p.m.), Deanne O’Sullivan, Eileen Zhang (7:15 p.m.)
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri (7:40 p.m.), Dawn Bentley, Bill McAlduff, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy.
2. **Chairman’s Introduction** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*
3. **Public Participation**
Martha Bethel spoke as an Acton resident and teacher in favor of having the current assistants in her classroom (referring to the possible change for next school year). They help her to differentiate instruction for the various levels of her students and build their self-esteem because their work is recognized. She spoke against requiring assistants to do lunch and recess duty. Corinne Hogseth asked that someone move to change Indigenous Peoples’ Day back to Columbus Day. She felt that the vote last year was not well thought out or well received by the community, including at PTO meetings.
4. **Superintendent Search Update** – *Bill McAlduff*
 - 4.1. Press Release, 12/5/17
 - 4.2. Announcement Vacancy Letter/Executive Opportunity
 - 4.3. Focus Group Meetings: *Mon, Dec 18 and Wed, Jan 3- both at 7 p.m. in the JH Library*
 - 4.4. Recommendation for Makeup of Screening Committee – **VOTE**

Mr. McAlduff reviewed the materials in the packet. NESDEC has been distributing the announcement widely through their network. At the last School Committee meeting, it was decided to have 6 focus group meetings, but due to the holidays and school vacation, the subcommittee decided to add a 7th focus group, with an additional parent/guardian/community group in January. He referred to the handout brought to the meeting and asked the Committee to take action on the makeup of the Screening Committee. The Committee discussed the proposed recommendation, noting that Amy Krishnamurthy, Diane Baum and Tessa McKinley were chosen as the School Committee members at the previous meeting. Brigid Bieber stated that the proposal was a very balanced group.

Once decided, communication will go out to all stakeholder groups inviting them to submit a letter of interest by January 4, 2018.

Paul Murphy moved, Dennis Bruce seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that the ABRSD Superintendent Search Screening Committee consist of 3 School Committee members, 2 Principals/Administrators, 2 Teachers, 1 Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) Representative, 3 Parents/Guardians (at least 1 Elementary, 1 Jr High/High School and 1 of these from Boxborough), 2

Community Members (one from each town) and 1 Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpEdPAC) representative (Preschool is included in this group).

The Committee discussed how these people could be chosen, referring to the memo. Ultimately the School Committee will vote on all of these members of the Screening Committee at their meeting on January 11, 2018. The Working Group could meet right after the deadline to prepare a proposed slate of members for the vote.

There was consensus that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), ABEA and SpedPAC stakeholders should decide on their members of the Screening Committee.

Discussion of how to select the community members included:

- The required time commitment should be emphasized to volunteers, including availability between February 1 and 12 for initial interviews.
- Bill McAlduff clarified that he will only participate in the upfront part of this process, along with Beth Petr and NESDEC. Once the Screening Committee is formed, Bill will not be involved in the interviews or much of the process after that point.
- Asking the PTOs to assist in the recommending parent/guardian members was considered, but due to the complexity of having that many different groups (7 PTOs) involved, it was concluded that they probably would not want to take on that responsibility. Several co-chairs agreed. Mr. McAlduff added that typically the subcommittee/working group reviews the parent/community letters of interest and makes the recommendations to the School Committee.
- Drawing volunteer names from a hat was discussed as an option, however concern was expressed that there should be some diversity (in a number of ways) in the group, if the applicant mix provides the opportunity. Mary Brolin spoke against a random method of selection because it would not consider talent or experience. Attention would be paid to the desired factors such as members' towns and whether they had children at the elementary or Jr High/High School level.

Amy Krishnamurthy confirmed the consensus that the working group subcommittee will make this decision based on who volunteers.

4.5. Draft Minutes of 11/28/17 Superintendent Search Planning Subcommittee Meeting

<http://www.abschools.org/home/superintendent-search>

4.7. Take the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QDDTZVT> by Dec 20 at noon

5. **School Start Times Final Recommendation – Possible VOTE** – *Bill McAlduff, Marie Altieri*

Marie Altieri outlined the extensive work that has been done on this topic over the past two and a half years. Overwhelming feedback has been received in support of single tier busing for our elementary students and having later start times for our junior high and high school students. This has remained true after the additional costs were presented last year. The comment often heard has been “It is best for kids.”

Mr. McAlduff explained that they are still considering what the best end time of the school day should be. There was a discussion of our school field schedules including the multiple multi-year agreements with sport groups such as those using the Lower Fields that must be honored. Use of those fields at certain hours cannot be negotiated at this time due to those contracts. AB's participation in the Dual Country League was also discussed.

The proposed Start Time recommendation was described as a very positive first step. The administration tried to get to an 8:30 a.m. start but right now, the High Start at 8:07 and

Junior High at 8:00 is best for the District. After a couple of years of monitoring how it is working and what other districts are doing, if there is a belief that the start time should be pushed back further, then it can be considered, but it is an incremental process according to the Superintendent.

Committee members appreciated this first step. Deanne O'Sullivan suggested that after the High School schedule changes, the length of the day at AB should be reconsidered. It is currently 6 hours, 50 minutes which is longer than other schools. She likes what Weston is doing. She would also like to see elementary students start before the older students. Mary Brolin agreed about a later start eventually for the Junior High/High School. She advocated for staying strict about before school activities and not moving afternoon activities into the morning now. Brigid Bieber agreed about reevaluating in the future. She believes it is important to look at what School Choice is costing the District for busing so it can be quantified. School Committee needs to understand this to make informed decisions going forward. Eileen Zhang hopes a traffic study can be done for the new Junior High/High School start times because it could increase traffic on route 111. Mr. McAlduff appreciated that point adding that there is still a lot of planning and logistics to consider, including traffic patterns. Diane Baum emphasized the critical importance of kids getting more sleep. This change will help reduce their sleep deficit but she wants it to go further. Amy Krishnamurthy completely agreed.

Paul Murphy moved and Deanne O'Sullivan seconded the motion:

MOTION: that for the start of the 2018-2019 school year, the ABRSD adopt the same school start times for all 6 elementary schools by going to a single tier elementary level bus routing system, AND that the starting times of all schools be adjusted based on the following model: High School operates from 8:07 am to 2:47 pm, the Jr High from 8:00 am to 2:36 pm and all elementary schools from 8:50 am to 3:20 pm.

A member of the public stated that this was her first time at a School Committee and it was because the sleep issue is very close to her heart. She would like to see a 9 a.m. start and urged the Committee to focus on important topics like this. She stated that sports and after school activities are great but should not be driving these decisions.

The Committee VOTED and unanimously approved the motion.

6. **Before & After School Funding – VOTE – Bill McAlduff, Marie Altieri**

6.1. Memo and Slides

In September of 2016, the School Committee approved a goal of examining school funding at the elementary level. At meetings in June and October of this year, the Committee was presented with recommendations and discussed options. The Superintendent requested a decision by the Committee so the administration can implement changes for September 2018. He emphasized the importance of being very clear and firm about what is being proposed. For example, he stated that the Douglas Drop In Program has been very successful and they will not change it. The Administration understands and appreciates how dedicated each school's families are to their programs. While the Administration wants to keep the programs vibrant, they must also work within the rules (Slide 3).

One change from October is that if a school has 3 classes at a grade level, they could hire 3 people for 12 hours/week each or hire 2 people for 18 hours/week each. This flexibility was provided based on feedback that some schools currently have 18 hour assistants and they do not want to lose them if they could only now work for 12 hours. PTOs may still fund assistants as in the past, despite some discussion on that topic during the past year.

Paul Murphy asked about the issue raised at the beginning of the meeting, the objection to assistants being required to do lunch and recess duties in the new recommendations. Marie Altieri responded that over the past year, the Administration heard different feedback from different schools about this. They spoke with faculty members and the Senior Leadership Team extensively in the spring and fall. Some schools have always had assistants do this and others have not. This is a transition so it may or may not work well. The Administration understands that there is anxiety for some schools about this, but it is part of the agreement and they will work with staff on it. Deanne O'Sullivan added that the recommendation is based on what other districts do as well. Aides that do lunch and recess as well as assist in the classrooms really get to know the kids, which can be very advantageous, although it is two hours less in the classroom and some people may not want to do the job because of that. Deanne appreciated the time that she has spent talking about it with Marie and Bill and the PTO co-chairs. She believes that it is best for our district to do this.

Mary Brolin noted that it is not School Committee purview to decide how assistants are used, so if midyear it does not seem to be working, the Administration could change it without the Committee's approval. Diane Baum appreciated the longstanding tradition of providing assistants to teachers, and will support the recommendation, but she feels that spending a million dollars on uncertified staff is crazy. Marie pointed out that these are regular education classroom reading and math assistants. Dennis Bruce commented that the Committee tried to tackle this issue 6 years ago in 2011 but the difference now is that the principals are onboard and are still being give some flexibility.

Dennis Bruce moved, Brigid Bieber seconded the motion:

MOTION: that

- The Extended Day programs will continue to be available in each elementary school building and the Administration building, and
- Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, Community Education will administer these programs.

Douglas PTO co-chair Tracey Zachary appreciated that the drop in option will Douglas stay, and asked for clarification of where PTO funding can be spent. Marie explained that the rules are that PTOs may fund noncertified and non-benefited staff. Marie also confirmed that the Administration's recommendation includes assistants doing lunch and recess duty, but it is not part of the Committee's actual vote.

The Committee VOTED and unanimously approved the motion.

7. **FY19 School Calendar** – Second Read – **VOTE** - *Marie Altieri*

7.1. Proposed Calendar

Stating that it is the Committee's job to make decisions based on the community, Deanne O'Sullivan suggested that they return to Columbus Day and do a survey to see what the community would like to call the holiday on the school calendar.

Deanne O'Sullivan moved, Dennis Bruce seconded and it was:

VOTED and Approved: to move Indigenous Peoples' Day to Columbus Day on the 2018 -2019 calendar.

IN FAVOR: Baum, Bruce, Murphy, O'Sullivan, Zhang (12 ½)

OPPOSED: Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, Neville (5 ½)

ABSTAINED: McKinley, Minkin

Katie Neville pointed out that the Committee received a petition for Diwala to be added as a day off, but they did not decide to have no school that day. The Committee had a lengthy

discussion about how the district could or should recognize religious holidays given our diverse community. Points were made that:

- Decisions cannot support any one religious holiday over another, although having the two Jewish holidays and Good Friday off appear to some to be doing that.
- Decisions should be driven by the Administration and the ability to hold a meaningful day of education for students. The Committee must make informed decisions.
- A parent spoke in support of having Diwali as a holiday on the school calendar, as Lexington does, because she felt it would create curiosity for students and parents. Diwali is the largest religious holiday for Indians. She did a petition and in 2 days gathered 199 signatures. She felt that listing the date and having no school would be a step of embracing the school community and diversity.
- The two Jewish holidays and Good Friday have been no school days for a number of years at AB because surveys have shown that the district would have high attendance issues (students and staff) on those days, preventing effective teaching.
- Members like seeing numerous major holidays listed on the calendar, even if there is school on those days, although it must be balanced with being a readable calendar.

Dennis Bruce moved, Maya Minkin seconded the motion:

MOTION: to approve the fiscal year 2019 calendar as amended.

Diane Baum asked if a subcommittee should be formed to study the holidays question. It was agreed that major holidays should be listed on the calendar or a separate page that goes with it, similar to Westford's school calendar. Beth Petr explained that a list was included in the past but the State no longer offers this page. A link to an interfaith list is included, as has been done in the past. Amy offered to assist with compiling a list.

The Committee VOTED and approved the motion:

IN FAVOR: Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, O'Sullivan, Zhang

OPPOSED: Neville

8. **FY19 ABRSD Preliminary Budget Presentation** – *Bill McAlduff, Marie Altieri, Dave Verdolino (9:05)*

8.1. Memo and attachments

8.2. Slides

As Mr. McAlduff began the two month process that would lead to approval of a budget for the 2018-2019 school year, he thanked the administrators and budget subcommittee for their efforts and support and especially Marie Altieri and Dave Verdolino. Guidelines and assumptions were reviewed. E&D usage was proposed at the historical appropriation of \$200,000 including transition year usage of \$575,000 for single tier busing. The preliminary budget represents a total increase of 4.0% from the FY18 approved budget for a total of \$89,566,023. This is driven by salaries (\$350,000 of this is due to the shift of additional classroom assistant funding into the operational budget), student transportation, employee related fringe benefits and an increase in capital spending to \$1million. The salary expense includes the addition of 4.4 staff FTE's to improve class sizes to meet School Committee guidelines and address positions deferred from previous years.

Mary Brolin noted that the string group that played the previous night at the High School was terrific, as well as the chorus and band. She stated that the string addition has been a great investment for our students.

9. **School Building Committee Update** – *Mary Brolin*

- 9.1. Special 12/4/17 Town Meeting Results
 - 9.1.1. Acton Town Meeting Slides and Handout
 - 9.1.2. Boxborough Town Meeting Slides and Handout
- 9.2. Next Steps
 - Mary Brolin thanked everyone who attended the Special Town Meeting and contributed to the strong approval of the Building Project warrant article. The MSBA will vote on February 15th to approve our Feasibility Agreement, The Project Manager probably won't be hired until the end of March or early April, and the Project Designer in April or May. The next Building Committee meeting will be in January.

10. Subcommittee Reports

- 10.1. **Budget** Subcommittee – *Brigid Bieber (oral)*
 - The meeting on 12/8/17 was a prep for Special Town Meeting. The next meeting is Jan 12.

11. School Committee Member Reports

- 11.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Amy Krishnamurthy, Paul Murphy*
 - 11.1.1. Minutes of 11/30/17 meeting
- 11.2. Acton Board of Selectmen –
 - Diane Baum and Paul Murphy will replace Eileen Zhang as this important liason. A replacement was requested by Eileen due to her schedule.

12. Consent Agenda

Amy Krishnamurthy read each item asking members to request a hold on any item they wished to remove from the Consent Agenda and vote separately. There were no holds.

- 12.1. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes**
 - 12.1.1. Minutes of 11/20/17 and 11/17/17
 - 12.2. **Donations to our Schools** – *Bill McAlduff*
 - 12.2.1. Recommendation to Approve \$5,000 Donation from Littleton Electric Light and Water Department to Blanchard School – **VOTE**
 - 12.2.2. Recommendation to Approve \$1,000 Donation from Dassault Systems Solidworks Corp to Acton-Boxborough Parent Involvement Project (PIP) STEM – **VOTE**
 - 12.2.3. Recommendation to Approve \$2,000 grant donation from the AB Regional PTSO to offset the cost of 7th graders' folders at RJ Grey JHS – **VOTE**
- Paul Murphy moved, Dennis Bruce seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the consent agenda as proposed including: Approval of a \$5,000 Donation from Littleton Electric Light and Water Department to Blanchard School with gratitude, Approval of a \$1,000 Donation from Dassault Systems Solidworks Corp to Acton-Boxborough Parent Involvement Project (PIP) STEM with gratitude, and Approval of a \$2,000 grant donation from the AB Regional PTSO to offset the cost of 7th graders' folders at RJ Grey JHS with gratitude .”

13. **FYI**

Mr. McAlduff highlighted Kate Crosby's "Leading by Example Award" from the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs for promoting clean energy and environmental initiatives, noting that this is a unique position in a school district. Kate was congratulated.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: List of warrants, Superintendent's memo regarding the Superintendent Search Screening Committee, see agenda