

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
APPROVED MINUTES

Auditorium  
Administration Building  
15 Charter Road, Acton

March 5, 2020  
7:00 p.m.

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Members Present: Diane Baum (7:29 p.m.) , Michael Bo (7:26 p.m.), Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso

Members Absent: none

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.
2. **OPEN MEETING**
  - 2.1. Chairman’s Welcome
    - 2.1.1. Annual Spring Town Elections
      - Acton’s Election is on March 31
      - Boxborough deadline to submit papers is March 31 for Election on May 19
    - 2.2. Public Participation

Amy Maruskin, ABRHS Class of 2002, spoke in favor of naming the High School pool after Coach Jeff Johnson. She had addressed the Committee with this request about a year ago, shortly after Coach’s passing. She urged the Committee to listen to the community, citing a number of organizations that have now named things in his memory. She shared the petition that was started last year that has 1,074 names. Several community members spoke in favor of the request. A number of emails were also received by the Committee. The policy subcommittee will be discussing this at their meeting next week.
    - 2.3. High School Student Representatives Update

It was reported that there has been a general uptick in stress levels due to AP exams coming, spring finals and sports trials. Coronavirus is a concern. The High School is doing a good job at calming kids down.
    - 2.4. Superintendent’s Update

Mr. Light reviewed the bond information. A new district newsletter will go out digitally tomorrow to all families and any community members that have submitted their email address. There is a link on the Superintendent’s section of the website to sign up. John Petersen read a statement about his perspective on the risks presented by the coronavirus and how they differ based on a person’s age. He also cautioned about the dangers of discussions of averages because they can hide real issues.
  3. **PRESENTATIONS**
    - 3.1. School Improvement Plan Updates:
      - 3.1.1. Douglas School – *Principal Chris Whitbeck and Assistant Principal Jenna Larrenga*  
[https://douglas.abschools.org/about\\_us/school\\_council](https://douglas.abschools.org/about_us/school_council)  
Chris and Jenna presented on the “Visible Learning and Social Development” focus at Douglas.

Members liked the emphasis on engagement and relationships, including collaboration among the staff. Angie Tso asked if this new strategy is expected to have an impact on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literature results that Committee members talked about last year (when Chris was not there). This was

about using benchmarks and how to measure progress. Chris said that this will provide a dataset that will give them several pieces of information such as, where students start out in their writing ability, and then summative data about whether they've made progress or not. The student writing piece drove a lot of these decisions for Douglas.

Parents reached out to Chris with a concern and he reacted by having a book discussion with them. Chris said he would love a magic bullet that would allow families to be more involved with the schools and would like to increase this at a very early age for the children. Asked what the measure of success of the engagement of parents, planned or not, would be, Chris responded that it would be for conversations that parents are having with kids filter back into the classroom. An end of year survey has shown some measure of where they were successful and not.

The consensus on the rubric was noted as good work, and there was a good divide among teachers about meeting all the standards. This has led to staff discussing how a student should be able to go to any grade level teacher and have the same instructional level and standards. Chris said that that is being worked on. A member loved the approach of developing appreciation and kindness, and how it fits with the district's emotional wellbeing focus.

3.1.2. Blanchard Memorial School- *Principal Dana Labb and Assistant Leigh Whiting-Jones*  
<https://blanchard.abcschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=229316&pageId=498565>

Dana introduced his school council members and staff who came to the meeting. He spoke about Blanchard's Social Emotional Learning Goals, Curriculum and Equity and Culture. Leigh spoke about the wide variety of student writing that is done because kids choose their own reading and writing topics. Dana described a training that was done last summer with the staff. It is very structured, works with responsive classroom and has been a powerful experience for people as a way to frame conversations. Members asked if families are included in this approach and if it's also used in the cafeteria and on the playgrounds where a lot of interaction goes on. Leigh explained that Blanchard has a diversity that reflects the community. This foundation leads to conversations that draw people together whether on the playground or in the community. Dana explained that students are curious about skin color and hair types so the staff wants to help develop a language for children to talk about things like that. This includes discussions about things like bullying. It provides an excellent way to frame the conversation for students.

3.2. Lower Fields Annual Report – *Erin Bettez*

The Friends of the Lower Fields (FOLF) have completed their loan payments on this project. As a result, Community Education and the District now control field operations. Erin Bettez thanked the many community group partners who have been involved since 2012 in making this valuable resource possible for our schools, teams and community. JD Head and his staff have been instrumental. A new Lower Fields Committee is being established. The Memorandum of Understanding will be updated because it does not go into detail about this next phase. A plan will be developed to fund eventual turf replacement (approximately \$750,000).

Erin explained how many groups rent the fields and that there are a few long-term contracts in place for the next several years for popular days/times. Priority has been given to groups that helped with the project, and then times are open to others. The new stabilization fund provides a mechanism for this revenue stream. Noting that this is an excellent example of a public – private partnership, Adam Klein added that when considering the Capital Master plan of the district, similar partnerships should be kept in mind. Mr. Light agreed saying that the Boardwalk between the Douglas and Gates Schools is a similar need that could be publicized.

#### 4. ONGOING BUSINESS

4.1. **Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 2/6/20 and 2/13/20**

John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and the minutes were approved as amended.

#### 4.2. Superintendent Mid Cycle Goal Review – *Peter Light*

Mr. Light reviewed the upcoming steps in the evaluation process and the progress he has made on each of the goals so far. Members were invited to discuss the progress, ask questions, and provide feedback. Comments and questions from the Committee included:

- How do you see the various incidents that have taken place in our schools? How are they incorporated into our goals? This will be on the March 16<sup>th</sup> workshop agenda and the Superintendent’s most recent letter touches on it. The American Defamation League has said most districts are unfortunately experiencing these kinds of issues.
- How is literacy screening reaching a broad target? DIAL is a piece of the kindergarten assessment. There is also a very lengthy parent questionnaire. Screenings are done in the Spring and Fall. The beta version will replace the literacy screening in the fall.
- A member felt the District has a cultural understanding about how to teach reading that emphasizes a love of learning but, in her opinion, at the expense of building strong foundational skills. It was emphasized that we have 17 educators who are thinking about staff members’ roles and responsibilities. This work will be shared in the spring.
- There is a lot of need for literacy in different groups like multilanguage or disability as listed on the DEI report. It seems like there is a high focus on dyslexia. Will there be any professional training for other areas like disabilities, ADHD, high functioning autism, mental needs like anxiety and English learners? Mr. Light responded that dyslexia is an identified area of greatest need right now. Fundamental teaching practices are being used that benefit all students, not just those with dyslexia.
- Things need not match the school calendar exactly, although the Committee needs to understand why something is not done by year end when that happens. This is particularly true given the ambitious list of goals and that a new school is being built at the same time. Mr. Light was complimented on his ability to listen and his overall responsiveness to the community.
- Social emotional learning cannot happen without family support. The Administration was encouraged to look at additional ways to include families.
- The Data Management Group (DMG) will share their findings at the April meeting and that discussion will answer some of members’ questions.
- Educator growth and development is very important. Is there an evaluation measurement? Surveys can be helpful. Some teachers gather student feedback and then write a reflection.
- Are there any initiatives that focus on building teacher and student relationships or teachers and families relationships? The District is proud of the relationships that our students reported in the Challenge Success data. This will be discussed further at the workshop.
- Administrators have talked with the Equity Consortium about coming up with key data indicators and how to use them to set goals. What is the right data to measure?
- With the strategies we adopt, can we build a system that will take feedback along the way so we can improve and fine tune the strategy as it develops to gain better outcome? Mr. Light responded that the workshop will include a deep discussion about our strategy. He will share a draft action plan template with short and longer term steps for feedback from the School Committee.

#### 4.3. Recommendation to Review and Approve Bond Counsel/Financial Advisor report of results for Bond for Building Project – VOTE – *Dave Verdolino*

4.3.1. Press Release from the Financial Advisor

4.3.2. Ratings Direct

4.3.3. Slides and updated memo with revision for FY21 ABRSD Budget and Assessment

4.3.4. Locke Lord letter with Language for School Committee Approval Vote

Mr. Light thanked Treasurer Margaret Dennehy, Dave Verdolino, the Finance Department and all those who worked behind the scenes to help make the bond sale on March 3<sup>rd</sup> so successful. Years of planning,

some good fortune of timing, and smart work by the staff resulted in the average interest rate was 2.15%. This led to significant savings for the taxpayers.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to adopt the votes relating to the sale and issuance of \$76,175,000 bonds to be issued on March 12, 2020 as presented and written above, said votes to be incorporated into the minutes of this meeting by reference.

**4.4. Recommendation to Reconsider the FY21 Budget and Assessments – VOTE – Peter Light**

Adam Klein moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 be set at **\$97,420,768**, and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton **\$66,012,542** (consisting of a Capital Assessment of **\$5,620,491** and an Operating Assessment of \$60,392,051); and

Boxborough **\$12,202,690** (consisting of a Capital Assessment of **\$933,618** and an Operating Assessment of \$11,269,072);

with the remainder to be accounted for by the following sources of funds:

Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$15,345,811,

Anticipated Chapter 71, Section 16C Transportation Aid of \$2,097,225,

Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$50,000,

Anticipated Federal Medicaid Reimbursement of \$250,000,

Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$300,000,

Anticipated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$17,500, and

A transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$1,145,000.

**4.5. Director of Special Education Search Update – Marie Altieri**

Of the 13 candidates who applied, only two were qualified enough to interview. As a result, the Search Committee unanimously decided not to move forward anyone. Another search could be started, another interim director search could be started, or they could pursue if the current interim director would stay. Mr. Light recommended trying to keep our current Interim Director, Debbie Dixson and asked the School Committee for their thoughts. There was consensus to ask Debbie to stay, with the hope of trying to grow an internal candidate during the coming year. Mr. Light plans to first partner with SEPAC and his staff to discuss needs/opportunities. Candidates must have a special educator license and a Masters with experience in special education leadership.

**4.6. FY21 ABRSC Meeting Dates – Tessa McKinley**

The preliminary dates were reviewed. There was consensus on a workshop at the end of June and meeting on October 29 instead of the first week of November. The August business meeting will be determined after the member elections.

**4.7. Recommendation to Approve \$1,466.35 donation from AB Friends of Music for the ABRHS Performing Arts 2020 NYC Trip – VOTE – Peter Light**

The Administration is reviewing current travel concerns regarding the coronavirus. International trips are cancelled per the Governor. Our response to the changing conditions will be aligned with the local and national authorities. The trip to Spain will not happen. National trips have no recommendation yet but a letter is going to families regarding state trips (like this one to NYC) alerting them that a decision may be made soon. Donations would be refunded if trips are cancelled.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED:** to approve this donation from AB Friends of Music with gratitude.  
Amy Krishnamurthy abstained.

#### 4.8. Subcommittee and Member Reports

##### 4.8.1. School Building Committee Update –*Peter Light and Marie Altieri*

Design work continues to progress, with a focus on the media center and learning commons. The softball field plans have been reviewed. Nexamp has been selected to develop and install the school’s photovoltaic system. Meetings will be held soon with the Town of Acton’s Design Review Board and joint Land Use boards.

##### 4.8.2. Budget - *Diane Baum (March 3)*

Members discussed the bond sale and interest on the bonds. Legally, interest earned on the bond revenue must go into the general fund. We want to keep that money with the building project so as we go through the process if we have to go into contingency, we can reduce the tax bill by that amount. The amount we went to the bond sale with was the total amount of the project minus the contingency amount. The interest would go into the stabilization fund via a mechanism.

##### 4.8.3. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) - *Diane Baum/Amy Krishnamurthy (February 27)*

###### 4.8.3.1. Approved minutes of meetings on Jan 21, 2020 and Dec 13, 2019

The Finance Committee is voting on the warrant articles. They will vote on the schools’ next week now that the District has revised their budget following the bonding.

Diane reported that enrollment is up at Minuteman Tech. There is some concern since several member towns left during the building project, but there is overwhelming support for the school.

##### 4.8.4. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) – *John Petersen (March 5)*

Cash flow through seven months is consistent with a projected loss of \$1.3 million for FY20. The projection differs from the cash flow report on docushare due to anticipated stop-loss recovery and the “five week month” charged by Blue Cross. The Acton Health Insurance Trust plans were compared with GIC (Commonwealth) plans in terms of plan design and cost. On average, GIC costs are increasing 5% next year. Relative to Acton HIT, GIC plans have more tiering options for services and drugs to incent selection of lower cost providers and drugs. If ABRSD and the Town of Acton provided insurance through GIC our costs might be higher or lower depending on employee plan selections and we would lose control over plan design. The consensus of the Trustees is that further consideration of moving to GIC is not warranted at this time. John added that he recently attended the meeting of the Southeastern Massachusetts Health Group and found it very helpful to compare their discussion and perspective on health insurance with the HIT discussions.

##### 4.8.5. PTSO Liaison – *Diane Baum, Tessa McKinley, Angie Tso*

Tessa reported that the group met and agrees that it is a very valuable forum to share information.

##### 4.8.6. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) – *Diane Baum/Tessa McKinley (Feb 12)*

Discussion included the Special Education Director search as well as the draft recommendations, and MCAS performance and the need for regular and special education staff training. Diane attended a MASC special education meeting and learned that there is still talk about H.3911, An Act to Ensure Representation of SEPACs on School Committees.

#### 5. Statement of Warrants

The Chairperson read the warrants into the record and members of the Committee signed the documents.

#### 6. FYI

Angie Tso responded to John Petersen's statement regarding his perspective on the coronavirus (Superintendent Update agenda item). She shared a story about a nurse in China that got infected and how it quickly spread to her whole family, killing them all. She urged the Towns and Schools to proactively collaborate together and provide timely communication to prevent the spread of this illness.

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:09 p.m. as moved by Amy and seconded by Ginny.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda with list of documents used