

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting  
To attend: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/92570711247>

April 16, 2020  
7:00 p.m. Business Meeting  
7:30 p.m. School Choice Program Public Hearing  
7:35 p.m. (approx.) Return to Business Meeting

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Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 9:35 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso  
Members Absent: Maya Minkin  
Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino, Amy Bisiewicz, Marc Duci (Acton TV)

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1. **Call to Order**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

Due to the schools being closed as a result of the coronavirus, Tessa stated that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar by 10 of the School Committee members with Maya Minkin absent, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. It was also recorded and being live streamed on youtube. It will be posted on Acton TV's website at <http://actontv.org/on-demand/government>. Per the remote policy, all votes were to be done by roll call with each member stating their vote after the Chairperson called their name.

2. **OPEN MEETING**

2.1. Chairman's Welcome

2.1.1. Annual Spring Town Elections

The public was encouraged to check the Towns' websites for the most up to date information about the elections and Town Meetings. Acton and Boxborough's Elections have been postponed to June 2. Boxborough Annual Town Meeting will be June 15. Acton's new date has not been confirmed yet.

2.2. Public Participation – none

2.3. High School Student Representatives Update - none

3. **PRESENTATION**

3.1. **School Closure Update** – *Peter Light*

The District is now in the second week of Distance Learning. A survey is being developed to send to families at the end of next week regarding these efforts to see how students are doing with it. MCAS testing has officially been cancelled for all grades this year. Information about how the current 10<sup>th</sup> graders will be tested for next year, or current 9<sup>th</sup> graders in biology has not been provided yet. There are still many pieces that have not been decided or communicated by the state yet, including guidance about when we might reopen the building. Any reentry plan will have budget and other implications but it is best to wait for more definitive information before trying to make plans for some of these issues.

4. **NEW BUSINESS**

4.1. **Public Hearing: FY21 ABRSD MA DESE School Choice Program** – *Marie Altieri (7:30)*

At 7:30 p.m., the FY21 School Choice Program Public Hearing was called to order by the Chairperson. Marie Altieri reviewed the memo. Of our current 18 choice students, there is only one sibling planning to enter Kindergarten next year. There was a brief discussion of what the program is and how the new building project may affect whether we open up more choice seats in the future. It will depend on

classroom space. Since K-12 regionalization we have filled our classes with Acton and Boxborough students so have been limiting seats to only current siblings of Choice students for a number of years. Participation could help increase diversity if we had space in our classrooms to consider it, but it is not being recommended at this time. There were no comments or questions from the public when the Chair welcomed citizens to speak.

At 7:40 p.m., John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to adjourn the Public Hearing and vote in the open meeting.

**(YES:** Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

#### 4.2. **FY21 ABRSD MA DESE School Choice Program Participation – VOTE**

John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to continue in the school choice program and limit openings to one seat in Kindergarten for the 2020-2021 school year.

**(YES:** Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

#### 4.3. **Budget Update – *Dave Verdolino***

##### 4.3.1. FY20 Updates

Dave presented a preliminary look at the FY20 financial status, stressing that it was a work in progress, and ongoing daily. A 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter report will be done at the next meeting.

No material FY20 revenue surplus is expected at this time, given that the Medicaid reimbursement change is not determined yet and most of the earnings on the bond proceeds will not stay in the General Fund.

Regarding expenditures, the school closure has halted spending in some areas although much of it has not been quantified yet, particularly special education tuitions. Dave stated that there may be a net turnback of approximately \$500K although more information will be provided at the next meeting. A detailed analysis of personnel costs was reviewed showing that as of 4/16/20 we are projecting a surplus of \$185,000. This figure has swung from negative to positive so that is good news.

There was a discussion about the important of continuing to pay the collaboratives including Minuteman Tech assessments at the Junior High. The DESE recommends paying these programs, and their teachers continue to teach. We have paid the full assessment for Minuteman for the year. Mr. Light said that some of our out of district placements have done a fantastic job of implementing plans for students, while others are not providing as much. Each out of district placement is being carefully reviewed, including reaching out to the families, to see what the appropriate payment would be.

John Petersen noted that the Middlesex County Retirement System number is small but he expects they won't get a good return on their investments in the future. Dave will try to provide information at the next meeting about what will be done in the future about this area. Angie Tso asked if all of our collaboratives are reviewed annually and what that process is. Dave explained that collaboratives are participatory arrangements. Their annual budgets are voted on by their board members. Tuition payments are paid along the way. Assessments are paid up front.

Dave is reviewing capital with JD Head next week and will provide that information at the next meeting. Regarding E&D, he referred to Budget Saturday slide #11 showing the District's healthy reserve balance of 7.7% of the budget as of 7/1/19. A net surplus of \$500K at yearend would restore part of the \$1,145K of E&D included in the FY21 budget.

##### 4.3.2. FY21 Updates

There is currently no official guidance from DESE regarding FY21. These are unprecedented times and no one knows what will end up happening.

#### 4.4. Policy Subcommittee

Amy Krishnamurthy reported that the policy subcommittee met on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

##### 4.4.1. Graduation Requirements, File: IKF, **First Read** – Deborah Bookis

*(although the posted document says First Read was on March 19<sup>th</sup>, it was postponed to 4/16/20)*

Deborah Bookis reviewed the proposed changes that increase the math and science requirements to three years and establish a two year world language requirement starting with the Class of 2025. Larry Dorey and the High School staff were heavily involved in the proposal.

A member observed that the most impactful requirement affects 12 seniors or about 2%. He asked how these 12 students would be better served by these new requirements. Deborah Bookis explained that most students (97%) are actually graduating with these credits already but for those whom it may be too difficult, some exemptions will be made. One goal is that this change would allow the administration to create different kinds of electives for students and offer more choice. Mr. Light explained that some students are choosing a free period instead of taking an extra course of interest. We are trying to keep them engaged in the learning process instead of giving more free time.

An example was given of a senior whose last math class was in sophomore year. There was a gap in math because they didn't have to take another one, and they were not interested in any of the math offerings. This is not in the student's best interest, whether they are university bound or entering the work force.

Because other districts' requirements are much closer to the MA Core recommendations than AB's are, and so many of our students are already meeting the expectations, several members liked including it in the policy. The last time this policy was updated was in 2017 to establish a visual arts graduation requirement and 98% of students were already satisfying that.

A member expressed concern about the 3% of students who may have difficulty with the increased requirements. When asked if this change would mean the District will look for more choices for students of lesser abilities as well as those who needed more challenge, Mr. Light said yes, it would. Mr. Light, Deborah Bookis and Larry Dorey spoke a lot about that and agreed that they would be trying to increase the variety of coursework in the various subjects. They want more real world, practical, hands on, flexible classes to be offered, particularly using the STEAM resources. After hearing this explanation, the member indicated that he was listening.

Noting that Mr. Light said students should have less structured learning, a member questioned whether telling them which classes they need to take is a good thing for all students. Deborah pointed out that the MA Math CORE requires 4 years compared to AB's 3 with this change. There has to be a balance to satisfy students' passion in areas. Additional feedback on the proposed policy changes should be sent to Amy Krishnamurth before the next meeting.

##### 4.4.2. Recommendation to Waive Portion of Student Progress Reports to Parents/Guardians, File: IKAB – **VOTE** - (2/3 vote required per Suspension of Policies, File: BGF)

Amy Krishnamurthy shared the policy subcommittee meeting discussion and recommendation given possible grading changes at the High School as a result of the Covid-19 virus. This was originally mentioned in the Superintendent's School Closure Update memo dated 4/2/20. Typically a grading change would go through a year's worth of extensive study, and include a number of small group meetings of parents/teachers/students, per policy IKAB. The Administration does not have time for that type of process in this pandemic. They are asking for a short term waiver of the extensive cooperative study so the change can be made for this school year.

With the schools closed and distance learning in progress, students are 2/3 of the way through term 3 and have all of term 4 ahead of them. The administration does not plan to do grades for the final term, but the question is about term 3. Teachers do have some work from students that was done before the closure and some students would like credit for it especially if they improved. While it is simplest to do Pass/Fail grades for term 3 or no grade, the administration wants to be sensitive to all students. They plan to solicit some feedback about term 3. The only thing that is reported to colleges is the final grade. This would not remove parent-teacher conferences. Amy reminded members that the Committee does not vote on grading, but they do receive reports on it.

Michael Bo referred members to the second part of the proposed motion that says the Principal and Superintendent will share the changes with the School Committee. He interpreted that as the changes were not a final decision but a proposal. He felt that a proposal was consistent with the last paragraph of policy IKAB. He would like to see “such changes” be “such proposed changes” to ensure that the School Committee has a chance to provide feedback before changes are made.

There was a discussion about how the motion was being interpreted. Amy reminded everyone that Mr. Light clearly said that he is going to send out a survey for input. Subcommittee members Amy and Nora Shine felt the motion was the same as the subcommittee’s decision, but Michael disagreed. He advocated for inserting “proposed” between “Such changes” in the third sentence. Mr. Light offered to defer the decision until feedback could be shared with the Committee at their May 7<sup>th</sup> meeting but members agreed that this was important to vote now so the Administration can move forward. Paul Murphy commented that we’re in a year that is an asterisk for a lot of things, just like this decision. He encouraged members to let the teachers and the principal come up with a process that is streamlined and will work for them.

Angie Tso appreciated the survey that Peter will be doing on this. She offered some proposed wording that could be added to the subcommittee’s motion. (This was not a seconded motion.)

Amy, Nora and Tessa spoke in favor of the original motion language as recommended by the subcommittee. Tessa encouraged members to “Stay in their lanes” (per the MASC guidance) and let the administration move forward in a timely manner in the best interest of students and parents. John Petersen commented that the suspension policy BGF requires a waiver decision to be reviewed at every next meeting. He suggested that this be changed to specify for a certain time period for example. He also noted that the grading system was not being changed due to the corona virus, but because we have moved to a different learning method. He would like to know the basis for the administration’s decision after reviewing the feedback that they receive. Michael agreed with John and Angie that this should not be delayed but he felt strongly about the wording.

Adam Klein moved,

*“In the Student Progress Reports to Parents/Guardians policy IKAB to move to waive the cooperative study and evaluation by teachers, principals, parents, and the Superintendent or designee (last paragraph). Temporary changes to the grading system related to the Covid 19 virus will be made by the Principal and the Superintendent after consideration of feedback from parents, students, and staff. Such changes will be shared with the School Committee and the public. The waiver will be in effect until June 30, 2020.”*

Ginny Kremer seconded the motion and the Committee began a **roll call VOTE.**

**YES:** Murphy, Shine, Klein, Krishnamurthy

Angie Tso abstained, then offered a friendly amendment to the motion so it would read:

*“In the Student Progress Reports to Parents/Guardians policy IKAB to move to waive the cooperative study and evaluation by teachers, principals, parents, and the Superintendent or designee (last paragraph). Temporary changes to the grading system related to the Covid 19 virus will be made by the Principal and the Superintendent ~~after consideration of~~ **with due***

*diligence of collecting feedback from parents, students, and staff. Such changes will be shared with the School Committee and the public. The waiver will be in effect until June 30, 2020.”*

Michael Bo seconded the friendly amendment.

The Committee then **VOTED by roll call** on the amended motion as stated.

**NO:** Murphy, Shine, Klein, Krishnamurthy, Baum, Kremer, McKinley

**YES:** Petersen, Tso, Bo

The amended motion lost.

Michael Bo offered another friendly amendment to the original motion adding the word “proposed” to “Such *proposed* changes will be shared. ....” in the third sentence.

Angie Tso seconded the friendly amendment.

The Committee then **VOTED by roll call** on the amended motion as stated.

**NO:** Murphy, Petersen, Baum, Shine, Krishnamurthy, Klein, Kremer, McKinley

**YES:** Bo, Tso

The amended motion lost.

The Committee then **VOTED by roll call** on the original motion, as proposed by Adam Klein and the policy subcommittee.

**YES:** Baum, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso

**NO:** Bo

**The motion passed by over 2/3 and was approved.**

There was consensus from the Committee that because the motion to waive included an end date of June 30<sup>th</sup>, they would not need to keep voting this waiver at future meetings.

4.4.3. Draft Minutes of subcommittee meeting on 4/9/20

**4.5. Recommendation to Approve Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Distance Learning due to Covid-19 with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) – VOTE – Marie Altieri**

*This item was taken out of order at 7:17 prior to the School Choice Hearing.*

No changes were made since the Committee reviewed this Agreement at a previous executive session. Marie explained that this is part of the negotiated contract process and covers until June 30, 2020. If distance learning is still in place after that, they would go back to the union and see if changes should be made and/or the agreement should be extended. A member summed it up as “an impressive document”.

In response to a question regarding #16 in the agreement about work being done to translate our curriculum into online learning, Deborah Bookis explained that distance learning training teams were created to work on this. These stipended staff members are looking through all the different skills and concepts that we want to deepen for our students and how to plan for next year. They are creating lessons and activities for subjects by grade and ensuring that they are accessible for all students. District wide grade level meetings are held every Friday to share this information.

Adam Klein moved. Diane Baum seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve the Agreement.

**(YES:** Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

4.5.1. ABRSD and ABEA Side Letter re April Vacation - FYI

**4.6. Update on the Financial Position of EDCO Collaborative – Peter Light**

Mr. Light presented an update regarding ongoing financial challenges in the EDCO Collaborative. EDCO is operating at a deficit for FY20 related to prior financial challenges found in the annual audit report compounded by challenges around lost revenue due to the Covid-19 closure. The EDCO Board is considering a budget amendment which would result in an additional FY20 assessment to the districts.

Mr. Light indicated that he would continue to keep the school committee informed about the status of the collaborative throughout the spring.

## 5. ONGOING BUSINESS

### 5.1. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 4/2/2020 and 4/9/20

Diane Baum moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED** by roll call: to approve the minutes of 4/2/20 and 4/9/20 as written.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

### 5.2. Superintendent Evaluation Process Outline – Tessa McKinley

Tessa gave a broad overview of what will be coming up for this important process. A member asked if the School Committee can decide if they will be evaluating on the school closure. “Can they wait or eliminate or prioritize any of the indicators under the standard?” When Mr. Light presents his evidence he will help align that information with the goals. There may be some indicators that he and Tessa can talk about regarding closure that may be relevant. Summative evaluation documents will be sent to all School Committee members. At the May 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Superintendent will give a final report of the status of the current year’s goals and a request for public input is made. Public comment and written evaluations are due from members by June 5. The composite evaluation is discussed at the June 18<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting.

### 5.3. Subcommittee and Member Reports

#### 5.3.1. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light

##### 5.3.1.1. Recommendation to Authorize the Superintendent to Submit to the MSBA the Statement of Interest for the Conant School – **VOTE** – Peter Light

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

**VOTED by Roll Call:**

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on April 16, 2020, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee of Acton and Boxborough, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated February 3, 2020 for the Luther Conant Elementary School located at 80 Taylor Rd which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future Priority 2 - Elimination of Severe Overcrowding, Priority 5 - Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility, and Priority 7 - Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements; and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

##### 5.3.1.2. Minutes of meeting on 3/25/20 - FYI

The Building Project continues to be on schedule. They are getting ready to submit design documents to MSBA for more review. A critical step is getting another round of cost estimates which are scheduled for next Tuesday. This will trigger an additional look at the design, and some value engineering. Simultaneously, work on the modular has begun. The architect is preparing a bid package for early site work and septic field to be installed over the summer. In response to a

question, Dave Verdolino said the bond funding is on deposit with Mass Municipal Deposit Trust earning approximately 1.1%.

5.3.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – *Tessa McKinley (4/14/20)*

Tessa and Adam reported at the last meeting. There were questions about whether the school budget would show reductions when presented at the Town Meetings, but it is too early to say.

5.3.3. Budget Subcommittee – *Diane Baum (4/14/20)*

It was recommended to delay any decisions about the Kindergarten revolving account and refunding any PreK tuition for now. Dave explained that there is a way to apply some of the circuit breaker funds to the deficit. Tuition for students on IEPs who are in the All Day Kindergarten could be moved from the operating account to a Special Education account. DESE's Jay Sullivan recommends that districts do whatever they can appropriately do to get out of a deficit position. If it is a line item change, School Committee does not need to vote it, but would be made aware. A surge of scholarship need should be expected for next year.

5.3.4. Negotiations – Amy Krishnamurthy reported that they plan to come to School Committee in May with more information and a proposal in Executive Session.

5.3.5. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)

John Petersen report that last week, acting as chair on behalf of the Acton HIT, he instructed our insurance administrators (BCBS and HPHC) that the Acton HIT will cover any health care costs members might incur associated with COVID-19 including deductibles and copays. The nature of this incremental coverage will vary by plan: the standard deductibles (\$250/person), hospital copays of either \$300 or \$200 and for the HSA plan, the deductible of \$2,000 to the extent that deductibles have not already been met.

He took this action because it will support members actively seeking appropriate guidance and treatment for COVID-19. The action is also in harmony with decisions being made at the local, state and national level which require a coordinated response among disparate actors to blunt the impact of the pandemic. Secondly, since the action improves on the standard benefits by reducing member costs, no consultation with members is required. Third, the fiduciary responsibility of the Trust is satisfied as the various incremental costs (deductibles) will not materially change the expenses of the Trust. Lastly, this approach respects the alignment of benefits independent of insurance administrator.

6. **Statement of Warrants** – *Dave Verdolino*

Dave explained why a different process to approve warrants would be helpful now that schools are closed and meetings are held remotely. Because hard copies of warrants are not available for all members to sign and formally authorize them, warrant subcommittee members have signed so the checks can be mailed. An electronic folder will be created that members can review prior to voting their approval at the next meetings.

7. **FYI**

At 10:02 p.m., Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to adjourn.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda with list