

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
FY23 BUDGET WORKSHOP Approved Minutes

Administration Building Auditorium
15 Charter Road, Acton
Public Participation is in person only

February 17, 2022
6:00 p.m.

To view the meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Adam Klein, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Andrew Schwartz, Nora Shine, Yebin Wang (6:02 p.m.)
Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah
Others: Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino, members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

CALL TO ORDER

The ABRSC was called to order by Chairperson Adam Klein at 6:00 p.m.

Adam announced that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org. Because the focus of the meeting was the FY23 Budget, comments on items NOT included on the agenda would be welcomed at the next meeting on March 3. Adam noted that in the past week the committee has received several e-mail requests regarding the renaming of the High School pool. This is something that the School Committee intends to discuss at their next meeting on 3/3/22.

PRESENTATIONS:

1. **District Strategy & Priorities for 2023, Alignment with Budget** (*P. Light*)
2. **Taxing Capacity & Levy Limit: Municipal Revenue Considerations** (*M. Altieri, A. Klein*)
3. **Superintendent's Recommended Budget Overview** (*P. Light*)

With Acton at the Proposition 2 ½ levy limit, the \$1.7M deficit in the ALG Plan must be addressed. An override is not being considered. Options are to reduce expenses, increase revenue or use more reserves. The previous School Committee meeting included reductions of \$1.7M (coincidentally the same number) and now an additional \$1M in reductions is proposed by the District (further reductions of \$500K to operating budget and \$455K more reserves used). This still leaves a deficit of approximately \$800,000 in Acton. Committee members were asked for input on the strategies to close this gap: 1. Further staffing reductions 2. Recommend All Day Kindergarten (ADK) option 2 3. Increase use of reserves.

Questions and Comments:

- Members were very frustrated about the Town of Acton's budget position after the serious reductions that the schools have made. Mr. Light added that ALG meets

tomorrow so more will be known after both meetings (School Committee tonight and ALG).

- Acton's Minuteman Tech Assessment has come down a little so that is helpful.
- Given Acton's levy limit, the 2 ½% increase tends to turn into about 3% and is pretty stable over time. If inflation is 4 or 5% in the coming years, that will be a serious budget problem. Mr. Light agreed that holding the budget to a 3% next year will be a challenge again. Two major budget drivers in this year's budget process are healthcare and ADK and they will continue next year. Health care will continue a couple of years.
- It was confirmed that the proposed reduction in assistant hours now includes two grade levels, as opposed to one grade level in the previous proposal.

PRESENTATIONS:

4. Finance Overview (*D. Verdolino*)

5. Personnel, Enrollment, All Day Kindergarten (*M. Altieri*)

Questions and Comments:

- The ADK decision does not only affect tuition paying students. Content has to be delivered only in the morning when everyone is there as long as a half day program exists. Our failure to offer universal K affects every one of our Kindergarten students, especially when we have just been through a pandemic.
- We are one of the very few districts in the state that does not offer this and it is not acceptable. We can't balance this budget on the backs of 4 and 5 year olds.
- The Administration has gone back to the ARP budget and looked hard at it. We just don't have enough money in this budget to fund everything we want. The Administration cannot bring a budget to the Committee that exceeds our funding. Another challenge is that ARP money is one time funding and the expenses would need to be covered the next year(s).
- Why isn't this funding more accessible from the Town? Because the funding went to the Towns, not to the regional schools, the Select boards are in control of it. The Administration continues to try to work with the state for more funding.
- How can we move forward with all our literacy work and other curriculum and not have ADK? A member responded that not all kindergarten students need ADK. They have different experiences. Find a targeted way to give those that need it the experience.
- A budget can't go up from here, but it can go down. Tonight is not the end of what the Committee has to do.
- A member asked if the Committee was amenable to allowing PTOs to raise funds for the schools? There was a strong no response.
- Mr. Light explained plans to cover the roles that are lost with some of the cuts. There is no easy answer for all areas, but they have tried to take a balanced approach. This won't be the last year we have to make budget reductions. We do need to be careful about using one time funds, despite his desire to get to ADK.
- Relying on two communities for funding is a challenge.
- It's not just the towns but also our legislators we rely on. We are a suburban school district with urban challenges. We've seen a deepening of those challenges even before

covid. We now need to give an investment to our youngest learners that will yield long term investments. Maybe go a little deeper on assistants or some other creative idea to give this to our youngest. At ALG tomorrow we will tell them why we need the money we're asking for.

- Everyone was urged to listen because "the limit is the limit and the need is the need". This is not a luxury given who we are.
- Is ADK option 4 worth fighting harder for? Mr. Light can't suggest that the Committee budget for more funding than we believe we will get. He would have to make more big cuts if they want to do option 4. It would be going deeply into educational areas due to \$525,000 more cuts or reserves used plus \$220,000 more cut to the budget.
- Everyone is stressed now due to covid. A member voiced support for Option 2 because she was so hesitant to take anything away from teachers that supports them next year. It is a balance. Option 2 is difficult but a good choice.
- Principal Lynn Newman shared how classroom assistants play a critical role in addition to covering lunch and recess. They know the kids from the classroom when things come up. Assistants also play a bigger role in instruction now. They give tremendous value.
- Will cutting 3 High School FTEs, affect the learning experience of the students? Mr. Light replied that because High School class sizes are low compared to previously, and we are a larger school so overall we are comfortable with this cut if it is necessary. Principal Joan Dean agreed that it is "reasonable right now". Once you have more cuts than those proposed, disciplines within disciplines, that is very challenging.

PRESENTATION:

6. District Benchmarking & Comparable Communities (*P. Light*)

Mr. Light explained that the charts are very dependent on how communities code their data so one shouldn't really compare too closely. There is sometimes inconsistent coding. He looks for outliers, not at all of the different categories.

Questions and Comments:

- Prior to this year, the RADAR report was in a downloadable format, not now. It's now in a very macro level.
- Slide 74 of Staffing Changes FY16-FY23, shows where we had invested in various staffing groups over the years. Creating this chart has given us a chance to see how we compare with other districts generally. If we're well below or above the median, we could consider how to be more efficient or effective. There are many kids that can now attend our schools that could not before we added certain staff, but you cannot really measure that. One example is that Out of District tuitions are lower than previous.

DISCUSSION and VOTES

The Superintendent thanked the Administration for all their efforts on the binder material and presentations. The two votes tonight are key to giving them direction for ALG tomorrow.

ALL DAY KINDERGARTEN Comments:

- A good compromise is when both parties are not satisfied. Option 2 is that.

- It is not feasible to get to free ADK without doing real damage.
- Stop looking at free ADK as if it's a gift. We are keeping it away from students. The three years of Option 2 is too long to wait. There are discrepancies between racial, socio-economic and disability aspects regarding ADK.
- We have received emails from families that have not qualified for ADK tuition assistance that want it. Reconsider option 4. Our class sizes have come down so there may be room to think about a bit larger class sizes to get to free ADK more quickly.
- I have grave concerns about what option 4 would do to our schools.
- I'll probably support option 2 but this is excruciating, and particularly since it will be just as painful next year. The radar narrative shows we have a structural problem and we are often in the middle of the pack. Our representatives in the statehouse should have nourished our community's needs. Let your legislators hear about this.
- We have to negotiate in good faith. If free ADK is a hardship for our town, we have to find another way and that is option 2 for now.

Adam Klein concluded that in 2020 the School Committee voted the current Kindergarten plan and the community struggled because it committed future committees to their decision. Slide 87 is what was voted, and slide 88 showing option 2 is considering a change – “a win”. Voting \$1800 today does not commit the future School Committee to do the same next year. Members can change their mind next year just like they're doing right now. We are cutting the price in half with option 2.

Ben Bloomenthal moved, John Petersen seconded and it was,

VOTED: to set the All Day Kindergarten tuition for FY23 at \$1,800 as outlined in option 2 of tonight's Budget slides.

(YES: Bloomenthal, Cook, Krishnamurthy, Klein, Petersen, Schwartz, Shine, Wang

NO: Kremer, McKinley)

Mr. Light emphasized that he understands how important free All Day Kindergarten is to everyone. He reminded members that if more funding can be found, they can revote to lower the tuition.

Moving to the FY23 Preliminary Budget vote, Adam Klein reminded members that per page 7 (Section 10. A) of the Regional Agreement, “The preliminary budget shall be approved by a majority of the members of the Committee from each member town.” This is not the usual weighted majority.

Kyra Cook moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District regular operating budget for the fiscal year of July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023 be preliminarily set at **\$102,899,440**, (an increase of 3.19%) and that budget would be funded by member towns to be preliminarily assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$69,689,255 (an increase of 3.18%) and

Boxborough \$13,257,674 (an increase of 4.59%);

Offset by use of E&D Reserve in the amount of **\$1,500,000**;

With the remainder accounted for by other sources of revenues to be detailed in the final budget vote.

Amy Krishnamurthy voiced her appreciation to Peter Light and the Administration for all of their hard work to propose the difficult cuts that made this Preliminary Budget possible.

MINUTES:

Kyra Cook moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the minutes of January 27, 2022 as written.

WARRANTS:

Kyra Cook moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo).

ADJOURN

Tessa McKinley moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

Agenda FY23 Budget Workshop Slides (119)

FY23 Budget Binder including 401 pages as listed in Table of Contents (attached)

Recommendation for FY23 ABRSD Budget and Assessments, Required Preliminary Vote 2/17/22

Draft ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 1/27/22

Warrant Memo and motion to approve 2/17/22

NEXT ABRSC MEETINGS in the Administration Building Auditorium:

March 3rd at 7:00 p.m. includes **Open FY23 Budget Hearing at 7:05 p.m.**

March 17, April 7, May 5 at 7:00 p.m.

May 9 - Boxborough Annual Town Meeting begins

May 16 - Acton Annual Town Meeting begins

Next Community Coffee with the Superintendent & ABRSC Chair via zoom:

March 9th at 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.

Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools
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**List of Documents Used
(additional)*

Section 1	Overview Reports <i>(*brought to meeting)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Superintendent's Budget MemoB. Budget Meeting Slides*C. Staffing and Enrollment Report<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Staffing Report2. Staff Positions Reductions and Additions3. FTE and Enrollment History4. Enrollment UpdateD. Director of Finance Memo
Section 2	Financial Summary and Analyses <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. FY2023 Recommended Budget Summary -<ul style="list-style-type: none">Budget Overview and Significant ChangesFY23 Budget Funding SourcesFY23 Significant ChangesFY23 Recommended Budget Exp by AdminComparative Expenditure Summary by Character Code5-Year Summary of Budgeted ExpendituresB. Selected Budget Analyses -<ul style="list-style-type: none">Comparative Health Insurance InfoComparative Out-of-District TuitionLong-Term Debt FundingC. District Reserve Analysis<ul style="list-style-type: none">FY23 - Historical E&D and Reserve AnalysisD. Regional Assessment Information -<ul style="list-style-type: none">Budget Assessment Worksheet FY23 - Recommended Budget (Feb 17, 2022)E. Other Supporting Information -<ul style="list-style-type: none">FB & Ch70 Comparative AnalysisFY23 Chapter 70 SummaryFY23 Foundation BudgetALG Plan for 2/3/22<ul style="list-style-type: none">Proposed ALG SummaryALG Plan Reserves
Section 3	Comparable Communities Information <ul style="list-style-type: none">FY23 Comparable Communities Cover
Section 4	School Information <ul style="list-style-type: none">ABRHSRJ Grey JHSBlanchardConantDouglasGatesMcCarthy-TowneMerriamPreschool
Section 5	District-Wide Information & Departments <ul style="list-style-type: none">Superintendent - School CommitteeHuman ResourcesSpecial EducationFinanceTeaching & Learning

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Educational Technology
School Operations
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Section 6 **All Day Kindergarten**

Section 7 **Capital Improvements**

Section 8 **Special Revolving Accounts**
 Community Education
 Food Services
 Athletics
 Special Revolving Accounts Summary

Section 9 **Federal (Covid) Relief Funding Summary**

Section 10 **Supporting Documents**
 Enrollment and Class Size Reports
 ABRSD FY'21 Audited Financial Statements
 Acton Health Insurance Trust FY'21 Audited Financial Statements
 Regional Agreement