

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

Administration Building Auditorium
15 Charter Road, Acton

March 17, 2022
7:00 p.m.

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

8:15 p.m. (approximately) Executive Session

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (7:07), Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein,
Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Andrew Schwartz,
Members Absent: Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Yebin Wang
Others: Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. **Call to Order (7:00)**

The ABRSC meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

Although the meeting was being held in person, members of the public could view the meeting on Acton tv's youtube channel. Adam stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

2. **Chairperson's Welcome - Adam Klein**

Adam welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished them a happy St. Patrick's Day. Noting that the past week marked the second anniversary of pandemic teaching and learning, he again thanked all members of the Acton-Boxborough school community for their tireless efforts. He also thanked the committee members for sending in their thank you videos which were edited into a video and shared with all school staff.

a. **Public Participation – none**

b. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light**

Mr. Light thanked the School Committee members for the wonderful video they made for the school staff. It was very much appreciated by all.

Mr. Light updated members on a new "Early College" project that he has been working on with some of the High School administrators. Early college opportunities have been established around the country in a variety of different ways. They have been to Middlesex Community College in Lowell, and Assumption University in Worcester. He also recently had a meeting with Boston Architectural College. The hope is to begin offering some opportunities this summer for our students on the college campuses and provide scholarship money. Members were enthusiastically supportive of this new initiative. A comment was made that colleges really want kids who will stay in college, and this kind of program is a great indicator of success. The state has a whole program around early college and is putting a lot of money into it although they are focused on districts where students aren't typically enrolling in college.

3. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Recommendation to Approve Superintendent's FY23 Final Budget and Assessments - VOTE - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light gave a brief overview of the proposed budget and reminded the Committee that they have seen multiple versions since January 13th. He stated that 2/3 of members' weighted votes are required to pass the Final Budget.

John Petersen moved and Ben Bloomenthal seconded,

MOTION:

That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023 be set at **\$102,899,440**, and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$69,689,255 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of **\$5,719,382** and an Operating Assessment of **\$63,969,873**); and

Boxborough \$13,257,674 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of **\$983,514** and an Operating Assessment of **\$12,274,160**);

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

- Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of **\$15,492,511**;
- Anticipated State Transportation Aid in the amount of **\$2,200,000**;
- Anticipated State Charter School Aid in the amount of **\$100,000**;
- Anticipated Medicaid Reimbursement of **\$200,000**;
- Anticipated Investment Earnings of **\$150,000**;
- Estimated Miscellaneous Revenues of **\$10,000**;

And transfers from the following District reserves:

- Excess & Deficiency Fund in the amount of **\$1,500,000**;
- Capital Stabilization Fund in the amount of **\$300,000**.

John Petersen noted that the motion read does not contain the word budget, but says "appropriation". In his opinion, the motion does not constrain how E&D is used. Mr. Light disagreed because the amount cannot be exceeded and there was a brief discussion that included the Finance Director and Deputy Superintendent about turnbacks and the School Committee's responsibility for adopting a budget. It was pointed out that the motion language provided was consistent with language that the district has used since prior to regionalization.

Evelyn Abayaah-Issah asked for clarification of the plan for free All Day Kindergarten (ADK). It is currently planned that ADK will cost \$1800 for the next 3 years before it becomes tuition free for families because the district does not have the money for it at this time. Adam added that the Committee has been able to reduce tuition significantly more than their original plan called for, but it is still a high priority and can be reviewed again next year. In an effort to "manage expectations", Mr. Light cautioned that financially FY25 will be similar to next

year, with the possibility of another 10% increase in health insurance as well as inflation concerns.

The Committee unanimously **VOTED** to approve the motion.

b. **Superintendent's Mid-Cycle Goal Review** - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light began by stating that there are a few items that they will struggle to get to this year. Last year ended up with six goals and it was understood that they may not get to all of them. That has been true. Great progress has been made regarding early literacy, math plan, MTSS and frameworks, as well as partnering with The Leadership Academy for coaches that have expanded into all schools. Mr. Light hesitates to take on too many things at once, although the Early College Project is new and valuable. He would have loved to work more on the digital educational aspects of the pandemic but as kids returned, the staff realized they needed to work on Social/Emotional issues first.

Comments from the Committee included:

- Great format, really helpful.
- Many items are completed and in progress. It is better to defer an item, as he did, than to take on too much. Deferring means something has been reviewed and the decision made that not enough bandwidth is available.
- Regarding being off target for MTSS Self-Assessment, how will that affect our ability to roll it out on schedule? Mr. Light stated that he doesn't think it will affect the schedule. It has been done at the district level, but not at each school. Next year each school will have to pick a few items to focus on. A framework was needed before they could do a self-assessment. Deborah Bookis and the principals have worked really hard on this. Deborah added that there was a lot of learning around MTSS, which is a testament to our teachers that they would take such a huge project like this right now. Committee members were pleased with this.
- DESE called Mr. Light because AB was the only school in the state that did not see a dip in math during the pandemic. Our growth rate was 54%. All subgroups had 49% - a real kudos to the teachers and parents' support at home. Mr. Light gave kudos to our remote and hybrid learning programs because they were included as well.
- A member commented that a lot of progress has been made on things that we believe are important for kids' education. Now we have evidence that what we thought would make a difference has done so because we have this data point. Going forward, we should be more focused on reviewing evidence of student achievement.
- It should be recognized that the school building project is on track and we are getting ready to move students in.
- A member of the public said that while teachers have done a great job during covid to keep learning going, not all kids have progressed.

Tutoring should be provided for the kids that need it. He offered to volunteer and get others to do so.

c. **School Committee Workshop Planning - Adam Klein**

Adam asked for ideas for the summer workshop. Past topics included: Roles and responsibilities of the Committee, Leadership and operating protocols, District Strategy/goals and the Superintendent evaluation.

Nora Shine found her first workshop around how members work together as a committee very valuable. The SEED workshop was also very helpful. There is a lot of passion in the committee and this brought it out. John Petersen suggested a discussion of the point of leverage for decision-making. This includes figuring out when appropriate times are to do certain things and the flow of the School Committee activity calendar. The point of leverage is often months earlier than you would think. Workshop ideas should be sent to Adam.

d. **EDCO Closing Update - Peter Light**

The EDCO Board and the School Committee voted to terminate the Collaborative effective 6/30/22. Deficits were running at \$1-2M per year. A critical requirement for DESE's approval for closure is that EDCO resolve all liabilities prior to June 30, 2022. Mr. Light reported that EDCO is largely on track to close on schedule. He updated members on the status of the following: Retiree Health Insurance, EDCO Lease, Personnel and Financial Records, and Closing Costs based on the EDCO meeting held today. (see memo)

An important issue pending resolution involves two districts that have not committed to paying their financial obligations. Winchester had not said they would pay but in a discussion today with Mr. Light, they stated that they would. Lexington is a concern. Lexington tried to leave the collaborative prior to the termination, but there was a process that some of the votes were not appropriately done. The Board never made the motion to withdraw. DESE then saw the collaborative's finances and said no one could withdraw. Lexington is saying they will not pay. They also have not paid their FY22 member assessment. The critical issue is that if there is any pending litigation, termination cannot happen. Members do not want to continue past June 30th.

At today's Board meeting, members were very frustrated with Lexington. Member districts agreed to send a letter to Lexington stating the case for why payment is so important. AB was asked to take the lead on this activity. Mr. Light reported that although he had a "promising conversation" with Lexington today, he asked the School Committee to authorize Kyra Cook to draft a letter that Adam would sign on behalf of the Committee. Mr. Light described it as an emergency situation because these developments just became known at the meeting held this morning and the EDCO Board only has 70 days until the end of June. As a result voting to send a letter was not listed on the posted agenda. This situation could cost districts significantly and many are struggling financially right now.

Members discussed the request to reach out to Lexington and the most effective way to do that. People should keep reiterating the long term benefit of taking care of all of our children. Adam suggested authorizing a letter and having individuals reach out. The collaborative nature of the member districts working together on this termination was noted and very much appreciated.

Gary Kushner asked if this payment has been included in the budget. Mr. Light replied that it is available and could have been \$500,000 but is now down to \$100,000. This debt would not be extended to next year. This would decrease the amount of turnbacks we have.

Adam read the suggested motion:

“Move to delegate to Adam Klein the authority to finalize a letter to Lexington and Winchester with other school committees on Lexington and Winchester’s respective EDCO obligations and for the chair to sign such a letter on behalf of the AB School Committee.”

Ben Bloomenthal made the motion and John Petersen seconded it.

Nora Shine offered a friendly amendment to remove “Winchester” from the motion. Mr. Light agreed.

Ben and John accepted the friendly amendment.

The Committee unanimously,

VOTED: to delegate to Adam Klein the authority to finalize a letter to Lexington with other school committees on Lexington and Winchester’s respective EDCO obligations and for the chair to sign such a letter on behalf of the AB School Committee.

e. Subcommittee and Members’ Reports

i. ALG Update - *John Petersen (3/10/22)*

The ALG plan for FY 23 is final. With respect to FY23, Peter expects the net use of reserves to be in the range of \$300-500K. The SC budget subcommittee is not supportive of a Proposition 2 ½ override. Kyra thanked John for his ALG mentorship this year.

ii. Health Insurance Trust - *John Petersen (3/17/22)*

Cook & Co. presented the cash flow showing a YTD loss of \$0.52 million with four months remaining in the FY. The Trustees expect that the final loss will be close to the projected \$1 million loss which was used as the basis of the rate setting process. The Treasurer’s report through Dec 2021, six months, was consistent with the reported cash flow. The Trustees reviewed the actual rates for FY23 based on January’s vote to decrease the discount for the HSAs relative to the HMOs (18% discount reduced to 15% discount) and to increase rates so that overall revenue would increase by 10% increase. As a result the HMO rate increase for FY23 will be 9%, the HSA increase will be 13%.

The Trust compared our FY23 rates with carrier rates. The Trust rates are near the HPHC rates and somewhat below the BCBS rates. The BCBS rate recommendations have historically been high relative to actuals.

The Trust continued discussion of separation of medical and pharmacy benefits by reviewing an Optum analysis of pharmacy claims. The analysis suggested that moving to separate medical and pharmacy benefits may reduce pharmacy claims costs and hence costs for both employees and employers. Like everything health insurance, there is complexity in the cost analysis so the Trustees will conduct a careful evaluation before deciding if a broader discussion is warranted.

iii. **Mascot Screening - *Peter Light (3/16/22)***

The students are doing a great job. Five choices are now down to four: AB Bees, AB Noreasters, AB Revolution, and AB United. The Revolutionaries was shortened to Revolution. A brief description of each choice is being written so people can see what the students' thoughts were. A survey will be done. It is expected to be brought to the School Committee in mid May after the subcommittee votes their recommendation. It was noted that there are local teams the use some of these choices.

A member of the public expressed frustrated that the name colonial was not counted in the responses for new mascot suggestions. Mr. Light explained that when the School Committee voted to retire the Colonial last October, that made it not an option for consideration by the subcommittee. In response to a question about the process for naming the High School pool, Mr. Light invited the member to email him for a response.

f. **Consent Agenda - VOTE - *Adam Klein***

i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 3/3/22

Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the meeting minutes of 3/3/22.

John Petersen and Nora Shine abstained.

ii. Recommendation to Transfer Inactive ABRHS Student Activities Gardening Club Fund Balance per [policy JJF](#) - *NEXT MEETING*

g. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - VOTE - *Adam Klein***

Tessa McKinley moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo for wording)

h. **FYI**

4. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:25 p.m., Adam stated the need for an Executive Session to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21 (a) purpose (2): to conduct a strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel. He stated that the Committee would not return to open meeting.

Kyra Cook made the motion, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to enter executive session for the reason stated.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Bloomenthal, Cook, Klein, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Schwartz)

5. Adjourn

The ABRSC adjourned from executive session at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

- Agenda
- ABRSD FY23 Final Budget Recommendation, 3/17/22 (slides 116 – 121)
- Recommendation for FY23 ABRSD Budget and Assessments – Final Budget VOTE, 3/17/22
- ABRSD Calculation of Regional Member Assessments, 3/4/22
- ABRSD District Strategy 2021-2026/Mid-Year Update: Annual District Improvement Plan School Year 2021-2022, 3/17/22
- Update regarding the Closure of the EDCO collaborative memo from P. Light, 3/17/22 initially dated incorrectly as 12/10/21
- Draft ABRSC meeting minutes of 3/3/22
- Warrant memo, 3/17/22

FYI:

1. Updated Request for ARPA Subgrantee Funding, 3/7/22 to Select Boards
2. This Month in the Division of Open Government, [February 2022](#) -
Discussing Unanticipated Topics During a Meeting
3. Acton Annual Election is March 29, 2022, Town Meeting begins May 16
4. Boxborough Annual Election is May 17, Town Meeting begins May 9
5. ABRHS Performing Arts Presents, “*Colors of Spring*” - April 12 at 7 p.m. at Mechanics Hall, Worcester

NEXT MEETINGS:

ABRSC: April 7 and May 5 at 7:00 p.m.

Next Community Coffee with the Superintendent & ABRSC Chair via zoom: April 6 at 7:00 p.m.