

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

Virtual Public Meeting

August 19, 2021

To attend: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

7:00 p.m.

To preregister for Public Comment (required):

(pre-registration must be submitted 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting)

https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_saxt8y80Tgg-nUMs2yQgUQ

Members Present:	Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Benjamin Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang
Members Absent:	Tessa McKinley
Others:	Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

Adam stated that the meeting was being conducted remotely via zoom for the Committee as well as the public, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, due to Covid-19. The following members were in attendance via zoom: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Benjamin Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang and Adam Klein.

In an ongoing effort to make meetings as secure as possible, members of the public who wished to comment during the meeting, were asked to register 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting using the link found at the top of the agenda. Members of the public who wished to view the meeting could use Acton tv's youtube channel. The meeting was being recorded and posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org. Per the remote policy, all votes would be done by roll call.

1. Chairperson's Welcome - Adam Klein

Adam thanked the members of the public who sent approximately 400 emails to the Committee and preregistered to comment on the Mask policy revision at this meeting.

**2. Overview of Revisions to Masks/Face Coverings policy/procedures
EBCFA/EBCFA-R - Peter Light**

Mr. Light presented on the use of masks as a Covid mitigation strategy to help members make an informed decision. A goal was "to ensure the district's thinking about mask requirements is complex and reflects a broad range of available information, including why thoughtful and well-informed people may come to different conclusions". A history of relevant guidance from the MA DESE, DPH, CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics was shared. AB's vaccination rates of eligible students as of 8/18/21 are all significantly

above the national rates. Over 90% of AB staff self reports that they are vaccinated. The core mitigation strategies that have been unchanged, modified and lifted from 2020-2021 were reviewed. This included ventilation, cohorting, cleaning, lunchroom and transportation modifications, visitors, testing, distancing and more. See slides.

The proposed mask policy and procedures places responsibility for setting mask requirements with the Superintendent, in consultation with medical advisors. The school year would begin with universal mask requirements for staff and students PK-12. It provides flexibility for the Superintendent to relax or increase the mask requirements based on health data and transmission increase. Exemptions are designed to keep students safe but in school if possible.

3. **Public Comment -**

The Chairperson explained again that public comment for this meeting would be limited to the Masks/Face Coverings policy and procedures only. Members of the public who preregistered were invited to raise their hands so they can be recognized to speak for up to one minute each. In order to hear from as many people as possible and have a productive meeting, Adam stated that a total of 45 minutes would be spent on public comment.

Twenty four members of the public, including a number of local doctors, shared their thoughts. Comments included:

- Masks are unhealthy because people breathe in the CO2. They are especially unhygienic for younger kids.
- No restrictions will ever be enough especially when people are gathering in large groups for concerts now.
- ABEA President Mike Balulescu said over 400 of their members voiced strong support for the proposed mask policy.
- DESE is not mandating masks so parents should get to choose.
- Scientific studies show that masks slow transmission of the virus.
- Dr. Darling's letter was helpful. Follow the science.
- Kids should be in school with the risks minimized.
- Kids are not at risk. We should protect them from unnecessary mandates.
- Kids are ending up in the hospital with covid. We are still in the middle of a pandemic and should be wearing masks.
- There was zero in school transmission last year.
- Why aren't antibody tests mentioned?
- An older woman spoke because kids' health affects all community members so requiring masks helps everyone.
- A doctor cannot do surgery without a mask. Masks help those who cannot be vaccinated.
- With testing being done in the High School, the two groups could be treated differently and that could lead to bullying.
- A student advocated for basing the decision on facts, not feelings.
- Mental health problems are increasing and wearing masks for two years in a row will make it worse. Let parents decide.
- Let common sense prevail and wear masks. Each level of protection helps.

- We are not talking about the flu. This is a high mortality issue.
- Classroom ventilation is critical. (It was confirmed later in the meeting that our classrooms all now have Hepa air purifiers and windows stay open.)
- In support of masks, a clinical psychologist stated that being in isolation and watching others get sick is traumatic to children.

4. **Discussion of Masks/Face Coverings Policy EBCFA & Procedures EBCFA-R**

a. Recommendation on First Read Revision from the Policy Subcommittee - *Nora Shine*

The policy subcommittee had reviewed a draft from the administration and asked for some edits and more information as well as input from teachers and the community. Those points have all been addressed now in the proposed version. The subcommittee strongly supported the flexibility given to the Superintendent in the revised policy to make changes based on how the upcoming months go.

b. Possible **VOTE** of Revision to the Policy - *Adam Klein*

Comments by Committee members included:

- Regarding staff vaccinations, the administration is currently in discussion with the ABEA on that topic.
- Concern was expressed about lunch time when masks come off and distancing is no longer 6 feet apart. Each principal will decide what is best for their building, as they are all different. This will be communicated clearly to families.
- Best policies are short, simplified and to the point. Some details should be in the procedures, not the policy. Example: use “air-borne pathogens” instead of the specific reference to Covid-19. Others felt including some details was important for background in a policy.
- The timing to revisit the policy is not specified because the Superintendent does not want an arbitrary constraint on it. He suggested that in the third week of school for grades 7-12, they will look at the public health data.
- Although in support of the policy, a member reminded everyone that “there is a cost to kids wearing a mask and trying to experience normal life again”.
- Masks and vaccines are the only solution right now. Follow the science.
- A member is concerned about distancing.
- The proposed policy is clear and allows the procedures to evolve.

Members discussed if voting after just one reading was warranted. Per policy BG, Policy Development, this is allowed if immediate action is needed. It was agreed that because:

- school would start on August 30
- a significant amount of public input was received
- families are anxious to know what they will need to do for their children
- the Superintendent would be emailing all families the next day regarding Covid-19 Mitigation Strategies and it would be helpful to include the policy

Ben Bloomenthal moved to vote on the policy tonight. Kyra Cook seconded the motion. Ben amended his motion to read, "to approve policy EBCFA as revised". Kyra Cook seconded the amendment. The Committee

VOTED by roll call and approved policy EBCFA as revised.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Bloomenthal, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, Shine, Schwartz, Wang and NO: Petersen)

5. FY22 ABRSC Subcommittee Assignments - Adam Klein

a. Subcommittee Descriptions

b. FY21 Assignments

Adam asked members to email him with their preferences for Subcommittee assignments. He noted that the Negotiations Subcommittee would not be assigned yet, and at the next meeting a new Community Outreach Subcommittee would be proposed.

6. Adjourn

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

VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the ABRSC with gratitude at 8:45 p.m.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Bloomenthal, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, Petersen, Shine, Schwartz, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

Next meeting: September 9 at 7:00 p.m.