

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

Administration Building Auditorium
15 Charter Road, Acton

November 18, 2021
7:00 p.m.

To view the meeting (no participation): <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

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

CALL TO ORDER

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

a. Chairperson's Welcome - *Adam Klein*

Noting that Thanksgiving was coming up, Adam expressed gratitude for everyone that works for the District from our custodians, groundspeople, crossing guards, bus drivers and food service staff, to all teachers, assistants, support staff, nurses, administrators and Central Office staff.

Several members recently attended the annual MASC/MASS conference and found it "energizing" and very valuable. Mr. Light and Tessa were invited to participate in one of the conferences. Of particular note was the focus on "elevating students' voices". Bringing together districts from across the state who are all dealing with common issues is invaluable.

b. Public Participation

Members of the public spoke regarding the retirement of the Colonial mascot. Comments included:

- Some Colonial supporters have been harassed.
- I don't see color or gender when I look at the Colonial.
- Students don't lose their right to speak when they wear a Colonial shirt.
- Too many kids had no say in the decision.
- This is about honoring our Town heroes, we should teach our history.
- The School Committee should have focused on having a better graduation. The Committee and Administration made up their minds early on to retire it. The process should be paused. More people should be involved.
- The decision to get rid of the mascot is an indication of a shift toward stereotyping being ok. More reflection is needed on this because we are all individuals.

Adam repeated the statement read at the previous meeting on November 2nd, "In regards to the matter of the school mascot: The decision that this committee made last October to retire the Colonial as the school mascot was made unanimously by the school committee, as a matter under our purview. This

decision was made by the committee following our open process, including listening, seeking input, researching, weighing multiple perspectives, carefully considering stakeholders with differing opinions, and finally, discussing and deciding as a committee to retire the mascot. The school body can begin their process of choosing their new mascot. In making this decision, we have followed our school committee operating protocols, specifically working to support the educational welfare and well-being of ALL students in a positive district climate and culture, prioritizing student needs and interests above all else, and working actively to create an anti-racist community to respect the increasing diversity of our community. It is our hope that members of this community will act with inclusivity, understanding, and compassion, in this and other matters.”

c. Superintendent’s Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light reported on: Protocols for inclement weather, Responding to incidents of bullying, harassment and bias, Vaccine updates and clinics for children ages 5-11, Masks and covid protocols, and a recap of the November 2nd Professional Learning Day for our educators. Updates are posted on the website.

PRESENTATION

d. K-12 Student Enrollment Projections and Class Size - *Marie Altieri*

Marie did the annual presentation using the October 1, 2021 enrollment numbers and projections from May. She does not expect a lot of change when the updated projections come in. K-12 Enrollment Change for 2021-2022 is -54 students with most of the decline coming from the High School. There was an increase of 31 kindergarteners. Covid appears to be responsible for the shifts. The Spring projection was fairly close to actual enrollment.

Comments and questions included:

- Given the drop in elementary enrollment and consequently class sizes that brought us back in line with our class size guidelines, does that mean if enrollment increases by 10%, we would increase our number of sections by 10% and our budget by 10%? Marie replied that we would try to maintain the class size guidelines per our policy but those are School Committee decisions.
- Can the Committee request that Minuteman Tech discuss their per pupil costs when they present their budget? Also, could the state provide more support for vocational education so communities won’t be so hard hit? Mr. Light responded that most vocational schools are at capacity, including Minuteman. He thinks the state might find a way for all schools to provide more hands on experiences for kids that are more aligned with career pathways. What is making Minuteman Tech attractive to the students that leave to go there? This is an opportunity to think about what our AB students are being offered.
- Do we see other losses from our High School, for instance, transfers to charter schools? Marie replied that our private and charter school numbers are very low compared to other districts. Numbers are done in January so we will see how they look post covid. We may consider asking students why they transferred.
- How do our class size guidelines compare to other districts? Our policy and guidelines were reviewed in 2014 and reaffirmed in 2018 by the School Committee. For many years AB was in the top five of the state for large class sizes and high student-teacher ratios but we’ve dropped to the middle of the list now since covid.
- What is the optimal number for class sizes? There is no way to calculate that because of all the factors involved such as building and classroom sizes, as well

as because we have to provide education for all children in our towns. We regularly adjust the number of classroom sections based on the number of kids.

- e. All Day Kindergarten (ADK) Financial Update - *Marie Altieri*
Marie reviewed the district's ADK program and ongoing discussion about moving to universal tuition-free ADK, including the significant budgetary implications. The goal was to provide background information in anticipation of the FY23 Budget process. It was acknowledged that the tuition may not be decided before the Kindergarten Family Information night in January. Option A is a return to the plan discussed two years ago (pre-covid). Option B includes use of \$600,000 ARPA funding over 3 years, if it is allowed. Our legislators are also working to try to get more funding for this goal, including Senator Eldridge and Representative Sena in particular. We are one of only 25 towns in the state that does not have universal ADK. Ginny Kremer was thanked for her efforts as the Committee's legislative liaison. She has been advocating for this since 2017. A number of years ago grants were offered to support these programs but AB did not pursue them. Even if we receive financial assistance, we will still have to add it to the budget to keep the program going.

Members expressed strong support for making this happen for next year, calling our status "embarrassing". A comment was made that, "We can't move forward on other initiatives if we are still charging for All Day Kindergarten." A member said that increases of \$180K, 180K, 180K is not appealing. He advocated for a level progression over this period of time, noting that it would require prioritizing items. It was stated that this would be even more for Boxborough residents given how their population is increasing. A member of the public also spoke strongly in favor of making universal ADK happen next year.

ONGOING BUSINESS (7:40)

- f. FY22 Calendar Updates (12/23/21 & 6/20/22) - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*
John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the changes to the calendar, adding Juneteenth as a holiday and making December 23rd an early dismissal day.
Mr. Light thanked the educators and staff for all of their hard work.
- g. Subcommittee and Member Reports
 - i. Policy Committee - *Nora Shine*
 - 1. NEW: Service Animals in School, File: IMGA - *Second Read* – **VOTE** – *to be discussed at the next meeting*
 - 2. NEW: Non-Service Comfort Animals in School, File: IMGB - *Second Read* – **VOTE**
Due to confusion regarding some of the wording, members may send feedback by Monday for the subcommittee to reconsider.
 - ii. Legislative - *Ginny Kremer* – *see Kindergarten discussion*
 - iii. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Update, Nov 4, 2021 - *John Petersen*
YTD revenue and expense are aligned with budget expectations for both the school and the town. John Mangiaratti reported on the Select Board decision to allocate ARPA funds including \$2 million for ABRSD.

The ALG model is carrying an assumption of a 3% increase in the municipal budget and a 3.25% increase in the school budget. As projected, the deficit remains about \$1 million. In December the Town will make its first formal budget presentation and the ALG plan will be updated to reflect the Town Manager's actual budget request. There was an extended discussion of property valuation and tax rates. Over the past year, single family home valuations have risen dramatically with the consequence that projected tax rates will go down from about \$20/thousand in 2022 to \$19 in 2023. The valuation change does not change tax bills. When valuation goes up, rate goes down and multiplying valuation times rate gives exactly the same tax bill. What can change bills, is a change in valuation of residential property relative to commercial property. If residential valuations increase more than commercial valuations, some of the tax burden shifts to residential property and residential tax bills will increase on the basis of the valuation shift alone. Based on the information discussed an increase in residential tax burden seems likely. The Select Board will meet on December 6th for the tax classification hearing which will set FY23 rates for each type of property. Historically, residential and commercial property have been taxed at the same rate.

- h. Consent Agenda - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 11/2/21
 - ii. Request for Approval of new RJGJHS Marvel Club
 - iii. Request for Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - Douglas PTO

Due to a minor amendment to the HIT update in the meeting minutes, Adam Klein removed them from the consent agenda for a separate vote.

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

VOTED: to approve the minutes as amended.

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

VOTED: to approve the consent agenda as amended.

- i. Statement of Warrants/Recommendation to Approve – **VOTE** – *Adam Klein*

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

VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo) (Note: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah was out of the room during the vote.)

FYI

- FY22 School Improvement Plans
- FY23 ABRSD Budget Timeline and Guidelines, 11/2/21
- 2021-2022 ABRSC Meetings, revised 11/2/21
- NEXT Community Coffee: Wednesday, Nov 17 at 7:00 p.m. via zoom
- Open Meeting Law Complaint Determination Letter OML 2021-158, received 11/15/21

Mr. Light noted that the School Improvement Plans were previously emailed to the Committee for review. Feedback is needed by November 19th so the principals can finalize them. They will all be posted under the District Strategy section of the website.

Kyra Cook noted that she was so impressed with our students and especially the young woman who spoke earlier in the meeting. She thanked her for coming and speaking up.

ADJOURN

Tessa McKinley moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

NEXT MEETINGS: ABRSC on December 2 & 16 at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin Building Auditorium