

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

Administration Building Auditorium  
15 Charter Road, Acton

December 2, 2021  
6:30 p.m. Executive Session

Followed by Business Meeting at 7:15 p.m. approximately

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

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Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (6:35 p.m.), Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy (6:45 p.m.), Adam Klein, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Andrew Schwartz, Nora Shine, Yebin Wang  
Members Absent: none  
Others: Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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### CALL TO ORDER

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein. He said that the meeting will be recorded when the Committee returns to open session at approximately 7:15 p.m. and it will be posted on Acton TV's website at [actontv.org](http://actontv.org).

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

Adam stated the need for an Executive Session to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21(a) purpose (3): to discuss strategy with respect to litigation because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee.

Tessa McKinley made the motion and Ben Bloomenthal seconded. The Committee

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

(YES: Bloomenthal, Cook, Kremer, Klein, McKinley, Petersen, Schwartz, Shine, Wang)

Adam also stated the need for an Executive Session be convened under MGL Chapter 30A section 21(a) purpose 7, to comply with or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements - MGL Chapter 30A, section 22(f) to consider approval and possible release of executive session minutes from previous meetings on: September 9, 2021 and June 17, 2021. He added that the Committee would return to open meeting at approximately 7:15 p.m.

Ben Bloomenthal made the motion and John Petersen seconded. The Committee

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

(YES: Bloomenthal, Cook, Kremer, Klein, McKinley, Petersen, Schwartz, Shine, Wang)

**The ABRSC RETURNED TO OPEN BUSINESS MEETING at 7:33 p.m.**

a. Chairperson's Welcome - *Adam Klein*

Adam welcomed everyone and reminded them that members of the public who wish to view the meeting may use Acton tv's youtube channel and that the meeting was being recorded and posted on Acton TV's website at [actontv.org](http://actontv.org).

b. ABRHS Student Representatives Update - *Depre Carr, Rohan Ravindran, Molly Norris*

Adam welcomed the newest representative, freshman Molly Norris. The three reps spoke about:

- the value of having Diwali as a no school day next year as it teaches kids about other cultures and represents "the hope that this world will get better". A member stated that it is unfair to only give some holidays off.
- the new anonymous reporting system at the High School and that although it is good, it is "not the whole story" because the issues are not just around bullying. There are some student concerns about false reports and the protection of those reporting and being reported on. It was agreed that it is still better to have an anonymous report than not to have it.
- Regarding an issue with school attendance, a rep thinks it involves about 100 students who are missing classes and not a major issue for most.

c. Public Participation

John Petersen read a statement regarding Barbados' recent decision to become a Republic and separate from the monarchy, and Sandra Mason's inauguration as the country's first President. Sharing her remarks, "As we celebrate all that is good in us as a people and travel onward, we must avoid the trap of merely reliving, retelling and relying on our past achievements as a nation. Instead, we must seek to redefine our definition of self, of state, and the Barbados brand, in a more complex, fractured, and turbulent world.", he urged AB to show the same resolve as we move forward in finding a new school mascot.

Several members of the public spoke in support of the School Committee and the process used to retire the Colonial mascot. They appreciated the invitations to students, families, alumni and the community to share input last fall. A member stated that people "cannot continue the harassment of our officials. Move forward." Another member "applauded the process" and said it is "what I want us to be doing – more inclusive and fair". Another parent noted the "true leadership of the Superintendent and School Committee members" when a group of alumni were upset about the school mascot being replaced. "Our community is changing. This should be the students' decision." "I empathize with the loss, but it isn't about you and me, it's about protecting children who see a mascot on the wall that they can never be. Let them learn. Memorialize the contributions and history of the colonials now, and create safety for all children."

Adam repeated the statement read at the previous two Committee meetings: "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.”

d. Superintendent’s Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light reported on: #AB Connects partnership with Acton TV, AB Students featured in Energy Storage Project Video, Principal Searches, Latest COVID news and protocols, Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) Family Advisory, English Language Parent Advisory Council Meeting #2, Protocols for Inclement Weather, and the next Coffee with the Superintendent and School Committee Chair.

Evelyn Abayaah-Issah advocated for more support for the DEI efforts, including Dawn Bentley, who is fantastic but stretched too thin on many important issues. She asked the district to consider hiring a full time Chief Diversity Officer. The Committee will be updated soon with more details on AB’s recruitment efforts. A firm has been hired to help publicize our needs to increase candidates of color. Evelyn urged the District to set a goal for this and “make a commitment” to it. A member noted that the Committee has talked about this many times and all districts are trying to do this right now so there is a shortage of candidates.

## PRESENTATION

a. Budget Introduction and Context - *Dave Verdolino*

i. *ARPA Update*

Dave Verdolino gave a preliminary introduction to the FY23 budget including major budget drivers and high level preliminary predictions of major revenue and expense categories. Members appreciated the new dashboard format. Dave stressed that the reserves amount cannot be considered in isolation. Projected assessments show an increase of 4.15% with Acton’s assessment being 3.52% and Boxborough’s being 7.52% for next year. The net budget status at this time is projected to be -\$846,900. This gap is beyond the funding means as presented. The point of this presentation is to be able to make informed funding decisions about other priorities. Dave also noted that while not included in this report, Community Education is not able to continue carrying some of the general expenses that had been shifted to that account a few years ago when they had a large surplus of revenue.

Comments and questions from the Committee included:

- These projections include taking back the first year of ADK tuition into the budget.
- The incremental costs of opening the Boardwalk campus include more custodial expense because it is a bigger building. Also new buildings use more electricity and even though it will be “net neutral”, the solar panels won’t be operational until the parking lot and other items are complete.
- Items 1-12 on the dashboard will continue to be refined over time. When the FY23 facilities budget request is submitted for example, Dave wonders how JD Head will apply his extra revenue from utilities.
- These numbers will also show negative on the ALG spreadsheet. John Petersen advocated for seeing how some cuts might be made/prioritized instead of having to ask the Towns for financial assistance.

Mr. Light cautioned members because this budget starts out with a relatively large deficit at the end of the year. We need to figure out how to close the deficit first, then decide how to move surpluses around to other things. Not everyone will be happy. Adam Klein has told the Boxborough Finance Committee to expect this type of assessment increase for next year.

## ONGOING BUSINESS

e. FY23 School Calendar - First Reading - *Peter Light*

This First Read of the proposed calendar for the 2022-2023 school year was similar in start date and no school days to the current calendar. A Second Read and Vote are expected to take place at the next School Committee meeting on December 17th.

Mr. Light explained that the ABRSC Calendar subcommittee spent significant time surveying families and shared a detailed report with the Committee at their meeting on November 30, 2018. The proposed draft calendar used those recommendations. Deciding which holidays will be no school days has been a very hot discussion every year. All federal holidays, including Thanksgiving and Christmas, must be no school. Public schools cannot take holidays off for religious purposes, but they can for secular reasons such as when student or staff attendance would be so low that educationally it would not be worthwhile. The subcommittee's survey results showed significant low attendance for Good Friday, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, to the point where not enough substitutes could be found on those days.

Evelyn Abayaah-Issah urged the Committee to try to make the calendar reflect our community given our changing demographics and DEI work. She asked that an equity lens be used to consider adding the holidays of: Eid, Diwali and Lunar New Year to the existing Good Friday and the two Jewish holidays as no school days. Adam Klein noted that the names of the holidays were removed from the first page of the calendar as a small first step.

Marie Altieri, who headed up the Calendar subcommittee, added that the biggest issue that came out of their work was that people did not want to go too late into June. It is really important to look at when the last day of school would be, as well as if the maximum 5 snow days were added.

Several members of the public spoke in support of adding Diwali as a no school holiday. Comments included: Do the work to celebrate the needs of all. Children need to feel they belong. Spread the holidays around. Diwali is a joyous celebration with families. Lexington and some other towns give Diwali off. Many emails were also received by the Committee requesting that Diwali be a no school day. Additional comments and questions may be sent to the Committee, as always, at [abrsc@abschools.org](mailto:abrsc@abschools.org).

f. Subcommittee and Member Reports

i. Policy Committee - *Nora Shine*

1. NEW: Service Animals in School, File: IMGA - *Second Read* –

**VOTE**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the new Service Animals in School policy IMGA. Adam Klein abstained. (Kyra Cook was out of the room.)

2. NEW: Comfort Animals in School, File: IMGB - *Third Read* - **VOTE**

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the new Comfort Animals in School policy IMGB. (Kyra Cook was out of the room.)

- ii. Budget - *Kyra Cook* – *covered in the budget discussion*

- iii. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz*

At the meeting on November 19<sup>th</sup>, members discussed new social media policy guidelines, and ways of sharing messages between the School Committee and the District as well as other entities. They plan to develop guidelines for developing an engagement policy that aligns with public meeting and information sharing policy, including a review of the work of similar districts. The Subcommittee will coordinate with the Policy Subcommittee. Neither the District nor the Committee has clear research regarding how our community consumes information, what kind of information, or how to best support the distribution of information. Next steps include creating a research plan for audience measurement and activity and collecting requirements based on research for communication engagement platform. Meetings are held the day after each SC meeting.

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

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 11/18/21
- ii. Approval of Gift of a Piano to the Gates School
- iii. Approval of Donation of \$8,000 from Friends of the Acton Libraries to the ABRSD Libraries
- iv. Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - Conant PTO

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

**VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda.

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

John Petersen moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the warrants, see memo for vote language

**FYI**

- 2021-2022 School Calendar, revised for 12/23 and Juneteenth holiday, 11/2/21

- EDCO Collaborative Annual Report, 2020-2021
- #ABCConnects - Tour of the Boardwalk Campus, <https://youtu.be/ysRCj9tLacQ>
- NEXT Community Coffee: Wednesday, Dec 15 at 8:30 a.m. via zoom

## **ADJOURN**

Tessa McKinley moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

## **NEXT MEETINGS:**

ABRSC on December 16 & January 13 at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin Building Auditorium