

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

Virtual Public Meeting

January 27, 2022

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

7:00 p.m.

To preregister for Public Comment (required 24 hours prior to start of meeting):

https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_B6qlo_3PQb-Af-AV-iDs3A

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (7:03 p.m.), Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Adam Klein, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Andrew Schwartz, Nora Shine, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: none

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deb Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

CALL TO ORDER

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

Adam announced that the meeting was being conducted via Zoom webinar per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. The following members were in attendance remotely: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang and himself.

In an effort to make the meeting as secure as possible, members of the public who wished to comment during the meeting, were asked to register prior to the start of the meeting using the link at the top of the agenda. These procedures are posted with our Public Participation policy BEDH. He also stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org. Per our remote policy, all votes would be done by roll call.

a. Chairperson's Welcome - *Adam Klein*

b. Public Participation

Martin Benson stated that he is waiting for records that were part of a public request regarding the Oct 15th and Dec 17th 2020 meetings, per an order issued 12/15/22.

c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Vaccination rates are going very well. Every school has 80% or higher, although an area that is lagging is students who have boosters. Booster clinic is coming up. Cases are dropping which is very good. As some of the athletic teams head in to their final games, we've allowed more fans to attend including the celebrations for seniors. The Administration has worked with the Acton Board of Health on these decisions.

A community member has expressed concern regarding t shirts worn by Gates students to celebrate black history month. The Superintendent reiterated that while our schools support Black Lives Matter, we understand that there is

complexity to it and it has become politicized, however, the schools “don’t venture into politics”. Asking students to wear certain t shirts, could have created an environment of making kids not sure about the shirts, especially during Lunar New Year. We want to be sure we celebrate all of our cultural events. It was decided that the kids should choose a color that represents themselves.

Marie Altieri announced that Principal finalists have just been chosen for Gates and Conant. They will visit next week and she hopes appointments will be made in a couple of weeks. Gates finalists are: Allison Warren, Patricia English-Sands and Dr. Franklin Rothwell. Conant finalists are: Jennifer Chen Fein, Patricia English-Sands, Lizbeth Felicano and Danielle Morrissey. Two finalists are candidates of color, which is very positive. Marie thanked everyone who served on the search committees. Peter thanked Marie for leading both of these teams. Mr. Light recently met with RJGJHS staff to kick off their Principal hiring process. The Douglas Principal search will also begin soon.

PRESENTATIONS

d. AB Protocols for Responding to Incidents Involving Hate or Bias - *Dawn Bentley*

“It is not the responsibility of our students to expose themselves to further danger and injury in their time of need and vulnerability. It is our responsibility as those in positions of leadership and power, with adequate resources, to make effective changes on their behalf.” *Nayoung Aimee Kwon*

Sharing the long term work that she has led on these important protocols, Dr. Bentley suggested that this quote shows why we are doing this. She outlined the goals and five sections of material: Ensure Safety of Individuals and the School, Communicate the Incident, Investigate the Incident, School-based Support for Targets, and Inform and Engage Stakeholders to Promote Healing.

Comments from the Committee:

- It is sometimes a challenge for the community. How can we assure everyone that we have thoughtfully “walked that line”? It is especially difficult when we have to maintain confidentiality about some details and the public does not understand.
- Dawn met with the World of Difference students and what frustrates kids the most is that laws have to be followed and they don’t understand why. She explained that often we have investigated an incident, but haven’t written anything to say “this is what we did”, “this is what we found” and “this is what will happen”. Building trust and communication along the way is critical to the students. We are trying to better inform our students along the way.
- Administrators think a lot about when it’s appropriate to send a communication out from the district, but we have to always be mindful about the sensitivity because students are involved. Mr. Light stressed that we also need to think about how incidents impact individuals in our community. How we respond says a lot about our values, and how we treat our students, and how we not respond. Repeated trauma has a significant impact on how kids

engage in schools. We need to be sensitive to the fact that some of the thoughts and needs of families in our community have been marginalized.

- This report is important but we need to also think about how we structure the information. Some social supports for the kids can retraumatize them if it's not handled well.
- We need to look at both sides of situations, including showing that they shouldn't happen in the first place.
- Interim measures are the first place our team wants to go - open and honest conversation that is age appropriate. Dawn added that it is life work, and takes years. We need to support all of our students.
- Thinking of our school resource officers (SROs), when does something cross the line between criminal and bad behavior? Dawn responded that if we think a crime has been committed, SROs are involved. They are not involved in all incidents.
- Sometimes the Administration is asked at what point is something a hate crime. Mr. Light explained that usually some criminal behavior is also involved (assault, vandalism, etc.). We have an MOU with our Acton and Boxborough police that if we know of a crime, we will report it to them. Our police try to do everything they can to use restorative practices.
- The emphasis on restorative justice and understanding the teaching moments is very much appreciated.
- Chuck Pollack, and Jaymi Formaggio read a statement of support as Co-Presidents of Congregation Beth Elohim in Acton. They thanked Dawn and the Administration for the protocols and emphasized that communication with stakeholders is vital throughout the process.
- Several Committee members agreed that it is critical to include all community groups. "Maybe this is the strategy that we need in this community. If we can't fix community and schools, it will keep on happening."

e. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Overview - *John Petersen (meeting on 1/20/22)*

John thanked Adam and Peter for giving presentation time to the HIT because it is so important to the budget. The objective of the Trust is to provide good health care, cost-effectively, for our employees (300 individuals and 550 families) and retirees (600 individuals). Rates are expected to increase 10% for FY23. This quick overview, as well as agendas, minutes and supporting documents are posted on the town's Docushare website.

Comments included:

- A 10% increase is a huge jump. Looking at multi-year 3 and 5 year averages and at those curves over time, the Trust feels they will be accurate if they are within \$1M. The numbers change so much year to year that a buffer has to be maintained. When we reduced rates, it made it hard for the town and Schools to budget. Next time John believes we would return the assets to the entity and let it flow to E&D so they can manage it with town resources.

- Why isn't a Boxborough rep in the group? HIT covers the Town of Acton and the Regional School District. This question has not come up. Marie Altieri pointed out that money paid into the trust from ABRSD employees comes from the ABRSD budget and the school HIT reps (Marie and Dave Verdolino) represent Boxborough in that role.
- HIT rate increases affect us pretty dramatically - \$1M = 1% of our budget.

ONGOING BUSINESS

- f. Budget - *Peter Light, Dave Verdolino*
 - i. FY23 Superintendent's Recommended Budget
 - ii. Line Item Detail and Projected Assessment Update

Mr. Light reviewed the feedback received since the last presentation and stated the need for additional feedback in 4 areas: the proposed change for DEI leadership, Special Education - Elementary caseloads and impact of possible reductions, Funding (revenue) to support changes, and All Day Kindergarten tuition. This direction is needed to prepare the budget for the next meeting.

Comments from the Committee:

- Several members voiced support for the DEI directorship.
- Is the reason Gates has such a small compliment of special education students because they leave in 4th grade because Gates doesn't have an appropriate learning program for that age group? Would like more information on that. Generally opposed to cutting any special education services.
- If ADK was tuition free, there would be no half day K offered. We are one of only 14 districts in the state that still offers half day. No time is more compelling than now to go to Universal Kindergarten.
- We should reshuffle some of the special education staff, especially at the Junior High where kids are struggling with mental health issues due to the pandemic.
- Given the trajectory of the DEI work we've done, we have to replace that position with a Director. We need someone dedicated to that work.
- We have put a lot of money and hard work into literacy and to put it into a half day kindergarten program is a shame. Cuts shouldn't come in teachers, but regular education assistants. Several members agreed with this.
- A member attested to the importance and need for the staff that support our special education children. Children who are not in the same levels are often being grouped together. He is against any cuts to these services.
- Three of our most vulnerable communities are on the table – special education, diversity, and our youngest learners. We must invest in all three of these things but we will lose something. Holding onto our FT educators is probably wisest thing to do. If we must sacrifice to help these 3 communities at a most significant moment, we need to do that. Hopefully we can help mitigate along the way.

- There are some people that disagree with the DEI director change but it will be someone dedicated to the topic as a specialist with a laser focus. Dawn Bentley was thanked for her important work.
- The ratio of students to administrators, special educators and regular educators is going to increase due to the budget. Which do we want to take more/less of a hit? Assistants' value is lower than some positions, but there will be more work to do. There are opportunities at each of the levels to work on this over time. One member doesn't want to tie a particular project to one type of money because it flows and the worst is to use one time money (like ARPA) for recurring expenses.
- This budget does not tie in with the ALG plan. There's still a gap of \$1.7M and Acton is at the levy limit. Decisions need to be made. Once Douglas and Gates move into the new building there may be some staff efficiencies. Regarding ADK, kids learn at different levels according to their development. It may not be essential for all kindergarteners to attend a full day. He is opposed to forgoing the ADK revenue, especially when ARPA ends.
- Are there any budget cuts related to regular education? Yes, 3 FTEs at the High School, but this is also part of declining student enrollment.
- All of these things are good but based on the budget, a member would stick to the original ADK plan. He'd go with option 2 if he had to choose.
- Adam Klein summed up that we want it all, but have to be prepared for consequences. We are still off at ALG. He supports Option 4 for ADK because option 2 commits future School Committees. It is excellent use of ARPA funds to give us the time we need to incrementally increase our budget. He supports the DEI Director, but is torn on the special education positions. Adam appreciated that Mr. Light reacted mid-year a few years ago when he added a couple of special educators because the need was there. Maybe if we have to remove a few positions now, we can add them back in later if the need exists.

Comments from the Public:

- Gary Kushner asked about ARPA funds, and how much is coming from Acton and Boxborough. At this time, Boxborough gave \$325,000 and it sounds like Acton will be \$1.5M but some is being held in reserve so it's not clear. Regional schools don't get ARPA directly. Gary stressed that the baseline is still very high for Boxborough and trying to add more things and not take any away won't work. He is thinking of the stakeholders, parents, and tax payers.
- Kara Lafferty spoke on behalf of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) urging the Committee not to cut any special education staff given "the most significant disruption to education in a century". She urged members to consider the need to re-allocate special education resources rather than removing a special educator.

The Superintendent heard consensus on wanting all three things. He will bring commensurate reductions that will be required to make this possible to the next meeting, as well as E&D usage and what it will look like for the two towns. The

School Committee will be voting the FY23 kindergarten tuition so more information will be provided on that. He heard interest in learning more about special education. This could be presented at a later meeting.

Adam thanked Peter, Dave, Marie and all of Central Office for the new ideas and options, especially the ADK options for consideration.

g. Subcommittee and Member Reports

i. Budget - *Kyra Cook (1/24)*

The subcommittee had a robust conversation about the ADK options. Kyra reported that the admin team really listened and she felt it showed in tonight's presentation. A productive zoom meeting was held with the state legislators – J. Eldridge, D. Sena and T. Gouveia about the red tape of funding. Another meeting is scheduled for next week with Senator Markey's office. Adam thanked Kyra for her advocacy on behalf of the students with our legislators.

ii. Policy *(1/25)*

Ginny reported in Nora's absence that Andrew Shen had the new Social Media policy draft reviewed by counsel. It should be ready for First Read at the next School Committee meeting.

iii. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz (1/14)*

Andrew reported on the meeting of 1/14/22. They discussed guidance around policy and roles associated with the committee, including refining the roles of committee members, ways of listening to the community, collecting and managing inbound messages, communicating outbound information and maintaining records. They recognize that engagement is Omnidirectional and that a clear strategy is necessary to ensure a great relationship between the committee and the community. Methods of engagement were reviewed. They identified the need for a communications map and the need to develop an outline for a workshop in consultation for the wider group. The near-term goal is to provide guidelines to create a policy.

iv. Mascot Screening - *Peter Light (1/19)*

A survey has gone out to the community. The students continue to amaze the subcommittee members. Over 2,000 responses have been collected from over 20,000 email addresses that were used.

v. Other

Dave Verdolino reported that out of the blue, we got an email from FEMA saying they approved 90% of our previous submission that they said was not approved. Hopefully this will come through. Now it looks like the deficit may go away (\$.5M). Dave credited Tom Blondin for his work on the submissions.

ALG report – John Petersen

The Acton Leadership Group (ALG) met this morning with Kyra and John as SC representatives. Both the schools and town reported FY22 expenses aligned with budget expectations. Town and School have updated budgets in the ALG plan. While the Town budget has been formally presented and reviewed with the Acton Fincom, the school budget is at an earlier state of development and will undergo changes as part of SC discussions. Marie commented that with the proposed budgets, the deficit in the ALG plan is \$1.7 million and this deficit needs to be a focus of our next meeting.

John Mangiaratti described the process by which ARPA funds have been allocated. David Martin and John noted that comments had been received from the public and SC members that the January ARPA rule change “standard deduction of up to \$10 million” was of such significance that the Select Board should revisit the ARPA allocation decision. David and John argued that the process in the fall was good and without a specific update to requests there was no reason to reopen the discussion of ARPA allocation or to commit any of the uncommitted ARPA funds. The school administration is in the process of reviewing educational requests in light of the rule change. The discussion will continue at ALG on 3 Feb.

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

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 12/16/21 ~~and 1/13/22~~
- ii. Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - Blanchard PTF
- iii. Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - R.J. Grey Junior High School

Kyra Cook moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to Approve the Consent Agenda

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

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

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

VOTED by roll call: to approve the warrants (see memo)

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

FYI

- Acton 2022 Annual Town Election Deadlines - highlighted
- Boxborough 2022 Election/Town Meeting Calendar
- NEXT Community Coffee: Wednesday, February 9 at 8:30 a.m. via zoom
- ABRHS 22nd Annual Community Service Awards Night video is at [this link](#).
- Public Comment to Acton Select Board 1/24/22 from Amy Krishnamurthy
- Final Aid Allocation Letter sent to State and Federal Legislators from Kyra Cook

ADJOURN

Kyra Cook moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:53 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

NEXT ABRSC MEETINGS: February 3 at 7:00 p.m. via zoom
FY23 Detailed Budget Meeting on February 17 at 6:00 p.m.
FY23 Open Budget Hearing on March 3 at 7:00 p.m.



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road - Acton, MA 01720
www.abschools.org

Finance Department
David A. Verdolino, Director
(978) 264-4700
dverdolino@abschools.org

February 17, 2022

To: School Committee Chair
From: Dave Verdolino /dav/
Re: School Committee Agenda - Warrants

Members –

Below please find a summary of warrants for which I am respectfully requesting your consideration and approval at tonight's regular meeting.

The Warrant Subcommittee has previously reviewed these warrants, for the purpose of check distribution. A majority of the Subcommittee conveyed their approval electronically and the related disbursements have been made. The full School Committee should vote its authorization of these expenditures of budgeted and other funds in its custody. All members have received for each warrant the information provided as shown below, namely:

1. (for vendor warrants, including payroll withholding remittances)
 - Declining balance register of payments ("Declining Dollar report")
 - Warrant detail (payments by vendor)
2. (payroll)
 - Payroll Warrant summary

As you know, these Warrants are customarily provided to you in hard copy format for your review and manual signature. Obtaining your approval in this manner will eliminate the future need to produce what could be many paper reports, all requiring your signatures.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation with this request.



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<u>Warrant Type</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Warrant #</u>	<u>Amount</u>
PAYROLL	01/27/22	P2216	\$2,843,656.08
	02/10/22	P2217	\$2,785,063.08
VENDOR	01/27/22	22-016PR (Payroll Vendor)	\$1,162,740.27
	01/27/22	22-016A (AP Vendor)	\$1,553.89
	02/03/22	22-016 (AP Vendor)	\$1,372,511.37
	02/10/22	22-017PR (Payroll Vendor)	\$548,215.55
	02/10/22	22-017SH (Student Activities)	\$20,253.62

Recommended Motion Wording

I move that the School Committee vote to approve:

Payroll warrant(s) as follows –

Number P2216	dated 1/27/2022	in the amount of	\$2,843,656.08;
Number P2217	dated 2/10/2022	in the amount of	\$2,785,063.08;

Payroll deduction warrant(s) as follows –

Number 22-016PR	dated 1/27/2022	in the amount of	\$1,162,740.27;
Number 22-017PR	dated 2/10/2022	in the amount of	\$ 548,215.55;

Vendor warrant(s) as follows –

Number 22-016A	dated 1/27/2022	in the amount of	\$ 1,553.89;
Number 22-016	dated 2/3/2022	in the amount of	\$1,372,511.37;

Student Activities warrant(s) as follows –

Number 22-017SH	dated 2/10/2022	in the amount of	\$ 20,253.62.
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