

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

Administration Building Auditorium

15 Charter Road, Acton

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

May 5, 2022

7:00 p.m.

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

Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

He stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

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

John Petersen and Nora Shine were thanked for their service on the School Committee. Adam Klein, Kyra Cook, Peter Light and members of the Committee highlighted their dedication to the community and congratulated them on their retirement.

a. **Student Representatives Update** – *next meeting*

b. **Public Participation**

Members of the public were invited to speak for up to **3** minutes each, per Public Participation policy BEDH. It was noted that the committee does not answer questions during this time. Questions may be emailed to the superintendent and the school committee for a response. The Chair asked that speakers be respectful and civil, and listen to others' concerns.

Scott Smyers followed up on his previous public comment regarding emails he has exchanged with Mr. Light concerning the anti-bias training that the District uses when hiring. He feels it creates a new kind of bias and wants to be sure it does not violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Martin Benson repeated his previous public comments regarding text messages alleged to have been sent during School Committee meetings that are involved in his Open Meeting Law complaint.

c. **Superintendent's Update**

Mr. Light extended his sincere gratitude to all staff members for their continued efforts on behalf of our students. Ms. Jennifer Faber has been appointed as the new DEI Director. Mr. Light looks forward to welcoming Jennifer to the District.

The Merriam Principal Search is underway. There have been quite a few cases of covid over the past two weeks in our schools, consistent with the state. Epidemiologists are hopeful the numbers will decline in the next week or two. There are no plans to modify our existing protocols at this time.

Regarding the new Early College Partnership, discussions with Middlesex Community College are proceeding. The hope is to pilot one course in the fall and expand the program over the next several years. This is an expansion of the Dual Enrollment opportunities that we have offered our High School students in the past. We are also speaking with several private schools. The goal is to allow students to satisfy some General Education requirements during their High School time so they can have richer college experiences. Committee members are excited about this opportunity to provide more challenges for our students. A question was brought up about equity regarding who will have access to this opportunity. A scholarship fund is being considered. One member noted that with so many students choosing tech schools (like Minuteman Tech) and AB being such a college-directed High School, she wished more opportunities could be provided to kids interested in technical school, especially given the increased social-emotional challenges we are seeing.

In planning for FY23 a consistent theme across all of our stakeholders is that many of our students are struggling with under-developed social emotional skills and behavioral and mental health issues. This will be a primary area of focus for planning. When students experience trauma they cannot learn effectively.

2. Guests and Presentations

a. R.J. Grey Junior High School Update - *Principal Jim Marcotte*

Jim Marcotte described how RJG is “building a joyful, inclusive community of engaged learners”. When he was complimented on doing a great job, Jim gave credit to his predecessor, Andrew Shen. The team model is very important to RJG’s success, for students and staff. Jim said that they “balance a lot on the backs of the teachers”. The teaming focus allows teachers to support each other, and the students. The advisory group is another great focus for next year.

b. ABR High School Update - *Principal Joanie Dean*

Joanie Dean spoke about the Year in Review and 2021-2022 Goals and Entry Findings. She described a welcoming, supportive community, working toward excellence in academics and activities, and focused on SEL and DEI. When asked about the School Improvement Plan process, Joanie replied that it was different than in her previous district. How staff worked together over the summer and the work of everyone on that committee was very useful to her because it was meaningful.

Mr. Light thanked both principals for the great job they have done in their first year, Jim as an interim and Joanie as a new person. She is known as a listener and can bring people to consensus.

3. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. **Announcement of Mascot Finalist - *Peter Light***

i. Subcommittee Update

ii. Mascot Recommendation (*First Read*)

1. Vote on Acceptance will be at the ABRSC meeting on May 19th.

Mr. Light reviewed the process that was used. This request started with our students. This is not about changing what happened during the time that the Colonial was the mascot. He suggested that we need to do some reconciliation with the people that did not want it changed, acknowledging that they will be proud “Colonials” forever.

The students involved were thanked for their impressive work and their ability to synthesize the significant amount of community input that was received. They compiled information, listened to others, brought the ideas back to the student group and helped to bring the thinking forward to the Subcommittee.

It was the unanimous consensus of the Student Group and the Screening Subcommittee to recommend “The Acton-Boxborough (AB) Revolution” as the new mascot of the ABRSD, as defined by the students. In response to why there was no proposed image of the “Revolution”, Mr. Light explained that members with professional experience stressed that the visual mascot should come after there has been time to talk about what people want the “Revolution” to represent.

The community was invited to comment again leading up to the Second Read and vote scheduled for the next meeting on May 19.

Public Comment:

Approximately 20 members of the public spoke. Many of them had spoken about the mascot in previous School Committee meetings. Many of the points made, both in support and not in support of the change, were the same ones made at previous meetings. A speaker felt questions from the public should be answered as this was an agenda item, not public participation. The Chair disagreed.

Comments in Support of “Revolution” included:

- Change is hard. AB is one of four schools that challenged their mascot recently. Thank you for centering on equity for all.
- Requiring that the majority of a town must be in agreement to change a mascot is ridiculous. It should matter if a group of children are uncomfortable.
- I was not in strong support of the proposed new mascot, until I read the statement of definition and thought behind it. I am thrilled now because “Revolution” has potential to really capture the spirit of the school. People who say they are the Colonials, they won’t lose it.
- Thank you for responding to the students’ wishes. This was a well-run process with appropriate input. Motivation for the new name is well done.

- Regarding the cost of changing the mascot, there are many things in our schools that not all community members benefit from. There are many students that will have a sense of pride with this new logo.
- I appreciate the diversity of families that live here that are different from my family. If AB aspires to be welcoming we need to focus on this diversity.
- We should look at this choice of “Revolution” not just as a change of mascot due to legitimate concerns, but also as an innovative improvement and refinement.
- I live in reality, not a bubble. The past mascot does not represent all of us in town. Let’s find solutions to some of the real issues in towns – bullying, offensive graffiti, drugs, and alcohol.
- The Acton Minutemen marched past my house. I’m proud of living in Acton and that the Committee had the courage to change this. “Revolution” is a great name and well supported.
- I am pleased that the students started the process. There was some back and forth, which is good.
- I learned a lot by listening to everyone’s comments and appreciate that part of the process. There is a lot of hope for our community. “Revolution” is an amazing choice. We are doing very important modeling for our kids for how to go through this process.
- We need to listen to each other. It is time for a mascot change. Whether you want it or not, it’s coming. Let’s do it together. It can be difficult to listen but the Committee did that. Many people are loud and will be heard. I appreciate that they listened to the quite people as well.

Comments not in Support of Changing the Mascot included:

- Survey votes to keep the Colonial were not counted.
- Costs to change the logo on signs and uniforms will cost a lot. We don’t want to pay taxes for this, or spend school budget funds on it. Legal fees were also spent. How much will this all cost?
- You recently stated that the District was over budget for next year by \$2M. Why are you spending money on this change? The process was flawed and probably illegal. You have a fiduciary responsibility to taxpayers.
- Freshman Soccer Coach Ammendolia always talked about Isaac Davis and standing up against people trying to take away your spirit and liberties. Now people and students who have built that “Colonial” pride are being called racist or bigots by others who don’t even know them. They don’t understand the actual damage they are doing to the community and the students.
- I have never felt everyone so against each other in this town. How many kids wanted to change the name? Was everyone asked about it? This is all causing division.

More input will be requested from the public before the vote at the meeting on May 19. Questions may also be sent to the School Committee for answers. Regarding

concern for the budget, Mr. Light stated that funds are not being carried forward for this change beyond what was normally planned for uniforms to be replaced.

b. **Superintendent Evaluation Process Reminder** - *Adam Klein*

The timeline was reviewed with an emphasis on June 2nd as the deadline for members to submit their evaluations to Adam and the Committee Secretary. Even though the Committee is doing a 2 year cycle now, Adam thought it best to continue with the usual evaluation process timeline. Members will vote the composite review at their meeting on June 16.

c. **EDCO Update** - *Peter Light*

EDCO is on track to close their liabilities on schedule for this year. Lexington agreed to pay all of their costs. Lincoln Sudbury has agreed to take on health care management for EDCO, and our Ed Tech department to maintain the website for EDCO. Mr. Light estimates that AB will end up with an approximate \$100,000 cost, a much lower figure than originally estimated.

d. **Fair Share Amendment Resolution** - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*

Mike Balulescu spoke in favor of this amendment as a Merriam parent, Acton resident and President of the ABEA. This would be on the ballot in November. Mike was thanked by Adam and Ginny for his advocacy on this issue. Dave Verdolino said that the Commonwealth started to address this funding 2 years ago with the Student Opportunities Acton. This amendment would allow a 4% surtax on income above \$1M, would generate approximately \$2B annually for public education and transportation in Massachusetts. It was noted that this is not just about education, but also transportation.

Ginny Kremer moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: that the ABRSC, in partnership with the ABEA, supports the Fair Share Amendment and endorses its passage.

e. **Subcommittee and Members' Reports**

i. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) - *John Petersen (4/28/22)*

1. Appointment of New Representative (*next meeting is June 16*)

Cook & Co. presented the cash flow showing a YTD loss of \$0.96 M with three months remaining in the FY. The project loss for FY22 is about \$1.3 M, \$0.3 M higher than the projected \$1 M loss which was used as the basis of the rate setting process. The Treasurer's report through nine months was consistent with the reported cash flow. Tim Harrison reviewed his proposed contract for the next three years. The Trust agreed to sign the contract which allows the Trust to opt out after the first year. The Trustees approved the RFP for stop-loss insurance at levels of \$150, \$175 and \$200K.

Adam appointed Andrew Schwartz as the new HIT representative.

ii. Budget - *Kyra Cook 4/25/22*

Town Meeting slides were reviewed and edited. Kyra thanked members of the subcommittee, as well as Peter, Marie, Dave, Andrew Shen, Dawn Bentley, and JD Head for provided supplemental information with quick turnarounds so that the slides could be accurate and delivered on time. Budget Sub will likely meet one more time before the end of the year.

ALG Report – Kyra Cook (4/28/22)

Budget projections for the Town Meeting Warrant and to lay the groundwork for the FY24 budget process were discussed. The spreadsheet now shows more “realistic” projections for the upcoming fiscal year, though much is still unsettled and likely will change. Two items of particular note: 1. The spreadsheet at least reflects the carryover of budget stressors that drove our process for FY23. Other factors will likely be determined by the outcome of our upcoming contract negotiations. These must and will be addressed during Budget Sub’s meetings next year. 2. The impact of MinuteMan Tech’s assessment on the Town’s budget is more evident in this spreadsheet. See this year’s number for FY23 and the projected assessments for FY24 and FY25. We might want to take a look at this in the Subcommittee and as a full Committee in the next school year. ALG will reconvene sometime this summer or early fall.

iii. **Capital Improvements – John Petersen (4/26/22)**

The Capital Improvement website was reviewed. Next year they will refresh the Dore and Whittier Plan from a few years ago. The subcommittee will spend significant effort reviewing Conant next year. A way to upgrade the phone system is still needed. The District received a concern from the E911 state commissioner that Blanchard is out of compliance. We responded that we have a plan for this summer. We really need to replace our system so it is compliant in the next 2 -3 years. The new school coming on line allows us to build it in at the same time.

iv. **Facilities Renaming Assignments (Pool) Update - Adam Klein**

Amy Krishnamurthy and Ben Bloomenthal will serve on this subcommittee. JD Head and Steve Martin have also been appointed by Mr. Light. A first meeting will be scheduled. Ben has been a competitive swimmer and is happy to bring his qualifications to this group.

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

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 4/7/22
- ii. Recommendation to Approve Donation from Conant PTO of \$2,400
- iii. Recommendation to Approve \$1,800 Anonymous Donation for All Day Kindergarten Tuition Assistance

Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the Consent Agenda with gratitude.

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

John Petersen moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo for language)

h. **FYI**

All members were strongly encouraged to attend both Town Meetings.
Mr. Light highlighted the Gun Buyback event to be held on May 21st and the
Out of the Darkness Suicide Prevention Walk on May 14th.

4. Adjourn

Kyra Cook moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:32 p.m.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION (FYI)

1. [This Month in the Division of Open Government, April 2022](#)
2. Presentation for the Annual Town Meetings
3. Proposed ABRSC Meetings for 2022-2023
4. Acton Town Meeting begins May 16
5. Boxborough Town Meeting begins May 9, Annual Election is May 17
6. Safer Homes, Safer Communities - Community Gun Buyback, May 21
7. Student Enrollment, May 1, 2022

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

- Agenda
- R.J. Grey Junior High School Update Slides - Principal Jim Marcotte
- ABR High School Update Slides - Principal Joanie Dean
- Final Mascot Memo from P. Light 4/29/22, Mascot Recommendation Memo from S. Martin/J Marcotte/J Dean 4/29/22, AB Mascot Finalist Voting and Feedback Survey from A Shen 4/25/22
- Superintendent Evaluation Process Overview - Adam Klein
- Fair Share Amendment Resolution
- ABRSC Meeting Draft Minutes of 4/7/22
- Donation from Conant PTO Memo
- Anonymous Donation for All Day Kindergarten Tuition Assistance Memo
- Statement of Warrants Memo from D Verdolino 5/5/22
- Presentation for the Annual 2022 Town Meetings and FY23 Budget
- Proposed ABRSC Meetings for 2022-2023
- Safer Homes, Safer Communities - Community Gun Buyback, May 21 memo
- Student Enrollment, May 1, 2022