

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
Approved Minutes

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

November 5, 2015  
7:00 p.m.  
Followed by Executive Session

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*Members Present:* Diane Baum, Mary Brolin, Michael Coppolino, Amy Krishnamurthy, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland (8:10 p.m.), Deanne O’Sullivan (7:40 p.m.), Kristina Rychlik, (7:45 p.m.)  
*Members Absent:* Brigid Bieber, Maya Minkin  
*Others:* Marie Altieri, Bonnie Bisbicos, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mary Brolin, ABRSC Vice-Chairperson.
2. **Chairman’s Introduction** – Michael Coppolino read a statement in memory of former School Committee member, Michael Scanlon, who passed away recently. Mr. Scanlon was on the Committee for 6 years in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s and was an instrumental member of the School Building Committees for 10 years. He will be greatly missed by our community.
3. **Statement of Warrant and Approval of Minutes**
  - 3.1. Minutes of the meetings on 10/22/15 (Workshop) and 10/27/15 (3 Board Meeting) were approved as written.
  - 3.2. Warrant #16-009PR dated 10/29/15 in the amount of \$2,562,951.79 and #16-010 dated 11/5/15 in the amount of \$532,875.07 were signed by the Committee members.
4. **Public Participation** - none
5. **Enrollment Report**
  - 5.1. October 1, 2015 Enrollment Report – *Marie Altieri*

Grades 1, 2 and 3 are growing beyond the projected enrollment. Cross-Town Enrollment (Acton students attending Boxborough’s elementary school, and vice-versa) has helped to reduce class sizes in Acton schools a little. Diversity continues to grow. One third of our K-12 students are Asian-Americans. Students who are economically disadvantaged is also a growing group. More students are being identified because if they qualify for certain programs, they now automatically qualify for free and reduced lunch.
  - 5.2. Enrollment Projections – *Peter and Mary Ann Ashton*

Acton enrollment declined by 51 students (-1.1%) and Boxborough enrollment increased by 17 students (2.1%). Projection graphs continue to follow the “S” curve, as is customary for all school communities. A question was asked about how many students typically come from 40B developments. Peter stated that the development in Boxborough includes only 1 and 2 bedroom apartments so they will not add a significant number of new students. Housing turnover is picking up, but a decline in births and low new construction are expected to lead to continued decline in enrollment over the next decade.

6. **RJGJHS Class Size Report** – *Andrew Shen*

Current enrollment (10/1/15) is 888 students. RJ Grey has experienced a steady decline in enrollment since the peak of 1003 students in 2008-2009. Enrollment is projected to increase to 916 next year and 929 in 2017-2018. If divided equally, the average team size in Grade 7 and Grade 8 is 111 students. Mr. Shen explained how class sizes and math sections are determined. He emphasized that analysis of shifts in overall enrollment must take into account the changing profile of student (and family) population and their needs. 13% of students at RJ Grey receive support from the Academic Support Center (general education support) and 54 Jr High students are considered economically disadvantaged.

A committee member asked if the Administration ever spoke with other communities about their circumstances. Mr. Shen said they did often, but there are many variations to what they do that make it hard to compare. Mike Coppelino asked what the Administration attributed a potential increase of 40% in special education students to. He pointed out that Westford has a dramatically lower percentage of special education students over time. They attribute this to intensive services during the elementary years. Mr. Shen was not comfortable commenting on the topic because he does not work in the elementary schools. One member responded that AB has an attractive system for students who need special education services. The cohort of students coming into 7<sup>th</sup> grade now is the same cohort that the Committee was hearing about when they were having difficulty in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Diane Baum advocated for the importance of early intervention. Mike Coppelino advocated for talking to other communities to learn about their best practices, saying, “We can’t do nothing about this.”

7. **ABRHS Class Size Report** – *JoAnn Campbell, Larry Dorey, Tina Van Ness*

Class sizes were presented by department and by level. The very complicated scheduling process, involving 150 course offerings, 8 periods and more than 1900 students, was reviewed. The many class changes that take place just before school starts and continue even after opening day, adds to the complexity. Class sizes at the High School has remained relatively constant over the past six years, with a slight decrease from 2010-11 to 2015-16.

Deanne O’Sullivan asked if the Administration tracks how many students override classes and if so, how successful they are. Larry Dorey replied that there is a long cultural history of allowing overrides for students, although it can be disruptive for students and teachers. He also said that they are considering whether to make Summer School only for enrichment, and not as a way to jump up a higher class level. For Physical Education (PE), the Administration added it in initially to free up class time in the fall, but now students are using it so they can take 7 difficult classes. That may not be good. It was pointed out that some athletes take PE to give themselves more time to do homework in the fall when they get a 2 hour workout due to their sport.

Mike Coppelino asked if the Administration is doing anything to limit the number of classes that a young person can take, regarding Health and Wellness and Mental Health concerns. Dr. Campbell said that there are absolutely ways to ask this question of a student. Mr. Dorey said that the High School Administration may reconsider an 8 period day because it allows students to take a lot of heavy classes. Dr. Campbell appreciated the Committee asking these questions because the Administration feels pressure to satisfy the community. She said that they are in year 3 of looking at Health and Wellness issues so they have been working on these questions. She described it as “a shifting culture.”

8. **MASC District Governance Program Update** – *Kristina Rychlik*

8.1. Recommendation to Approve ABRSC Goals – **First Reading**

The last workshop will be scheduled for January.

9. **FY17 ABRSD School Calendar – First Reading** – *Glenn Brand, Marie Altieri*

9.1. School Year/School Calendar, Policy File: IC/ICA

9.2. Staff Survey Results

9.3. Draft FY17 Proposed Calendar (*revised – Good Friday = no school*)

Dr. Brand proposed that, in accordance with last year’s discussion, the Committee consider the traditional three religious holidays off for next year (Good Friday, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah). He explained the benefit of having no school for students on the November 1st Election Day, and using it as a Staff Professional Learning Day, given that the Conant School and Jr High are voting sites for the town of Acton. Marie Altieri reminded the Committee that the District has 2 contractual days for staff professional learning. Dr. Brand asked that comments be sent to him prior to the next meeting, when a vote will be taken.

10. **Recommendation to Accept Gifts from the Elementary School PTOs – VOTE** – *Glenn Brand*  
Kathleen Neville stated that these gifts, totaling almost \$250,000, represent a lot of work by a lot of people. She feels that this is an inequity that the District has written off as school choice. Mary Brolin echoed Kathleen’s comments. She feels that although this is very generous, it pays for staffing and creates an inequity among the schools. The Committee agreed to discuss the issue at their summer workshop.

Maria Neyland moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously  
**VOTED:** to accept the gifts from the elementary PTOs with gratitude,

11. **Subcommittee Reports**

11.1. Budget – Maria Neyland reported that at their meeting on 10/28/15, they reviewed athletic fees and it will be on the agenda for next School Committee meeting.

11.2. Policy –

11.2.1. **School Councils**, File: BDFA – **First Read**

Dr. Brand explained that this revision to the policy was due to regionalization. The procedures were revised although the Committee does not vote on them. Mike Coppolino asked Dr. Brand to confirm that the School Improvement Plan name has not changed.

11.2.1.1. Procedures: School Improvement Plan, BDFA-R-1, Submission and Approval of the School Improvement Plan, BDFA-R-2, Conduct of School Council Business, BDFA-E-3

11.2.2. **New School Committee Member Orientation**, File: BIA – **First Read** – *Kathleen Neville*

11.2.3. **FYI** - Revisions to Procedures Only (no vote needed)

11.2.3.1. Special Education Parent Advisory Council, File: BDFB-R

11.2.3.2. Acknowledging Religious Holidays, File: ACD-R – *Maria Neyland*

11.3. Demographic Study Update – *Mike Coppolino*

Mike spoke to the professors at Boston College and they are looking forward to meeting with the group and learning more about how they can assist the District.

11.4. Legislative – Paul Murphy

11.4.1. Final Letter from ABRSC re Standardized Testing to Elementary BESE, 10/23/15

12. **School Committee Member Reports**

12.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Kristina Rychlik, Paul Murphy*

12.1.1. Meeting on 10/29/15

12.1.2. Three Board Meeting held 10/27/15

12.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – *Mary Brolin reported that they met last week.*

12.3. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)– *Mary Brolin reported that they might write a letter to protest that rates are being charged the same across the state.*

- 12.4. Acton Finance Committee – *Kristina Rychlik reported that School Committee will present on 11/24/15.*
- 12.5. Acton Board of Selectmen – *Mike Coppolino reported that the Board voted to take no position on the Special Town Meeting question.*
- 12.6. Minuteman Tech Update – *Diane Baum reported that Wayland voted to leave the District and a vote is needed by all the towns because it has to be a unanimous decision. Acton Town Meeting will vote on this. Vince Amoroso from Boxborough will be proposing a plan to let some towns leave the District. This will be important to stay informed about.*

**13. Acton Special Town Meeting re Citizens’ Petition (11/10/15) – Kristina Rychlik**

- 13.1. ABRSC Statement
- 13.2. Warrant found at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/7371>

The Acton Fincom voted to take no action on this non-binding resolution because there is no financial impact to the Town. The Town Moderator allowed the petitioners to propose a new statement that is not final yet. There is concern that the School Committee’s statement is not accurate due to the changes being made. The Committee was not in agreement about how to proceed, whether to defer making a statement, or just make a simple one given all of the last minute changes. Mike Coppolino was very disappointed and surprised that a completely different article was being allowed to come forward. The Committee doesn’t know what they should be responding to. Maria Neyland suggested that the Committee simply say, “This is our stance on PARCC and Common Core and because ...”

A School Committee meeting will be posted for 6:30 p.m. on 11/10/15, just prior to the Town Meeting to agree on a statement.

**14. A. Recommendation to Accept Donation of Baking Trays to ABRSD Food Service Department – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Mike Coppolino moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,  
VOTED: to accept the donation from Bisousweet Confections to the ABRSD Food Service Department with gratitude.

**14. B. Recommendation to Accept \$2,500 Grant from Crayola to the Conant School – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Mike Coppolino moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,  
VOTED: to accept the donation from Crayola to the Conant School with gratitude.

**15. Invitation to Nominate ABRSC member for Consideration by Acton TV Board of Directors – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

The School Committee declined to nominate a member for consideration but appreciated being asked.

**16. Superintendent’s Report – Glenn Brand**

- 16.1. Standardized Testing Statement from ABRSD Administration (*final*)
- 16.2. Report on 11/3/14 Professional Learning Day for Staff - Mental Health and Wellness. Dr. Brand noted that this was one of the first times the District included all faculty and staff including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and assistants to participate. The Day was very well received. He thanked Deborah Bookis for her efforts in organizing this extensive event.

**17. Senior Leadership Administrative Restructuring Proposal – Glenn Brand**

(Note: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Clare Jeannotte and Bonnie Bisbicos left the room at 9:30 p.m. for this discussion.)

Dr. Brand presented his memo proposing to restructure the three positions of the Director of Pupil Services, the Director of Curriculum and Assessment, and the Director of Personnel and Administrative Services. He appreciated that he has had his first year to observe the district and its structure, and is confident that some changes would be beneficial. He hopes to seek a vote at the November 19<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting so he can begin advertising the Director of Pupil Services position.

Paul Murphy liked the proposal including having Erin Bettez and Community Education under “an umbrella”. Deanne O’Sullivan agrees but asked why the Assistant Superintendent positions were taken away. Dr. Brand was not sure, and said it could have been a certification issue. Diane Baum liked the proposal but although the memo says it is a budget neutral change with no budget increase, she questions whether that is true given that the candidates must be certified. Dr. Brand responded that many districts do not have Assistant Superintendents but they are still compensated at that level. This would be no change in FTEs and just a slight change in responsibilities.

Mike Coppelino was not in favor of the proposal and had shared his thoughts with Dr. Brand. He understands the need for an Assistant Superintendent to have a “second in command”, and disagreed with Dr. Mills about flattening the structure and eliminating the position when it happened. Mike has trouble with adding three Assistant Superintendents at once, when most districts have only one or two. If the reason for this is to attract better candidates, then he would suggest proceeding, but not with all three at once. Regarding the salary neutral claim, he believes it will end up costing more money.

Paul Murphy asked what the difference was between a Deputy Super and an Assistant Superintendent. He does not mind appointing three at once, and agreed with the importance of having a #2 position for times when the Superintendent is out. He suggested having 2 deputies and one assistant superintendent. Mike Coppelino clarified that a Deputy is a more senior title, as when George Frost held the position. Kristina Rychlik was in support of the proposal and said that it was important to note that Dr. Brand said these could all change over time. Maria Neyland agreed with Kristina and is in support. If approved, the policies will need to be reviewed and updated. Comments should be sent to Dr. Brand before the vote on November 19<sup>th</sup>.

18. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

19. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 9:45 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously,

**VOTED** by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to litigation.

(YES – Baum, Brolin, Coppelino, Krishnamurthy, Murphy, Neville, Neyland, O’Sullivan, Rychlik)

Kristina Rychlik stated that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session solely to adjourn.

The ABRSC returned to Open Session at 10:05 p.m. and adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda