

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

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School  
16 Charter Road, Acton, MA

May 9, 2019  
6:45 p.m. Executive Session  
7:00 p.m. Open Meeting

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Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo (8:00 p.m.), Mary Brolin, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 9:00 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin (6:55 p.m, left at 10:48 p.m.), Paul Murphy, John Petersen  
Members Absent: Angie Tso  
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 6:45 p.m. by Chairperson Diane Baum.  
The open meeting was being taped by Acton TV.

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 6:45 p.m., Diane Baum stated the need to meet in Executive Session pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discussion strategy with respect to litigation because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee. She stated that the Committee would return to Open Meeting at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Paul Murphy moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by ROLL CALL:** to meet in Executive Session pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discussion strategy with respect to litigation.  
(YES: Baum, Brolin, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Petersen)

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3. **The ABRSC returned to Open Meeting at 7:10 p.m.**

3.1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

Diane Baum talked about MASC's Day on the Hill which she recently attended. She would like to encourage the student reps to attend this next year.

With Boxborough's Election on May 21, Mary Brolin was thanked for her 11 years of service, including 6 on the Boxborough School Committee. Diane and committee members shared their appreciation for Mary's knowledge, support and expertise over the years on the many subcommittees and activities that she has led or participated in. Mary is very proud that our students have such a joy of learning.

3.2. Recommendation to Accept Acton Boxborough Student Activities Fund (ABSASF) Donation – **VOTE** – Linda Ahern, President of ABSAF, introduced the student board members. ABSAF's goal is to raise money to support all extracurricular activities at the Jr High and High School. The Committee was very grateful for this year's \$70,000 donation. Since 1981, ABSAF has donated over \$1 million to the District.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to accept the ABSAF donation with gratitude.

3.3. Public Participation -

Steven Ballard thanked Mary Brolin for her service on the Committee. In the new school year, he asked that the Committee continue to respect the law, truth and their own principles. He suggested that some staff members who are also on town committees consider completing disclosure statements.

3.4. Student Representatives Update

Michael Cheng reported that seniors with internships had their last day of school on Thursday. On Friday seniors participated in Community Service Day. Student elections were held. The new School Committee student reps will be Caroline Browning, Michael Cheng, Rishi Girish, Justin Shan and Charles Wang.

### 3.5. Superintendent's Update – *Peter Light*

Mr. Light congratulated three Junior High students who participated in the recent Special Olympics. This is a wonderful new activity for our school district. More families are needed to complete the Challenge Success survey. The goal is 50% participation. Currently we are at 30%. June 19 is the last day of school.

## 4. New Business – Reports

### 4.1. Blanchard School Outdoor Learning Plan Space – *Dana Labb, Jenn Campbell*

Dana Labb introduced Blanchard parent volunteer Jenn Campbell. Last Fall the Blanchard PTF (Parents Teachers Friends) agreed to fund Lemon Brooke Landscape Architects of Concord to design a preliminary proposed plan. The Superintendent thanked Jenn for her work and passion on this project. The presentation was being done now because the group is ready to publicize the project. Because the Superintendent approves all fundraising but the School Committee would need to accept the gift, Mr. Light wanted to ask for the Committee's authorization before they started. A number of Committee members shared their enthusiasm for this project and what it would mean to the children and staff. They appreciated that a number of diverse groups were included and that a goal is that it is accessible and inclusive for all kids. It would also be a way to encourage the students to appreciate the environment and beautiful landscape outside the Blanchard School building.

### 4.2. Effective School Solutions (ESS) Junior High School Program Proposal – *Dawn Bentley*

The Superintendent introduced Dawn Bentley and Jared Delancey, LCSW from ESS. ESS is a "comprehensive clinical program to retain students with emotional and behavioral challenges in-district." The proposal is for a one year pilot program to address the significant needs of a small group of students that we know will be at the junior high next year. This would have been part of the annual budget process, but Dawn and Andrew Shen learned about the program and realized the need we had for it more recently.

#### Questions and Answers with the Committee:

Dawn and Jared described the very structured clinical nature of the program and how the staff works with the students and the school staff. They spoke about the benefits of keeping students in district, although acknowledged there are times when an out of district placement is needed and appropriate. Transitioning to the high school after 8<sup>th</sup> grade would depend very much on the student. The STAR program at the high school is very good at supporting students coming in and is as close to the ESS program as we have in our district now. We have nothing like STAR at the junior high at this time. The maximum number of students for the ESS program is 20 at a time.

Mr. Light explained that the cost for bringing ESS to our Junior High next year would be \$285,000 for the year. The plan is to fund it through our circuit breaker reserve account for the first year and then include it in the regular budget process for FY21 if the Committee agrees. There may be some Medicaid funding that could be obtained, although this program is not being looked at as a cost-savings decision. It is considered what is best for students. Before asking the Committee to vote on moving forward with a funding mechanism for FY20, Mr. Light wanted to give members an introduction and get some feedback.

When asked about the need for such an intensive new program, Dawn Bentley provided a breakdown about the specific needs of the students that we know will be in the junior high in the fall, and for the foreseeable future. A comment was made that although it is being proposed as a one year pilot, it would be more of a commitment to these students and their families and shouldn't be considered temporary. Jared described the process of searching for appropriate clinicians with expertise in clinical settings in the areas that we would need, once a contract is signed. He stated that they have good retention rates for staff because they appreciate working with individual students over time and getting to know them well, as opposed to a traditional clinical setting where those relationships are not usually made. The average stay

in ESS is a year, but some students stay with them for their whole time in a school. It is very customized for each student. Everyone involved (family, clinicians, principal) discussed and agrees when a student is ready to step down and leave the program. They are always aiming to have kids return to general education.

Members asked many questions but a number expressed support for this new possibility. A comment was made that this model fills a huge gap that school districts are dealing with. Our schools are asked to do things that the staff are not equipped or trained to do. Mr. Light agreed. Because this would be outside of the budget cycle for next year, he wanted to be very clear about how they could proceed and he wanted to ask them to assist in the decision. Mr. Light concluded that they will proceed to the next level of planning and will come to the School Committee for a final approval at the next meeting.

- 4.3. School Improvement Plan Update – Acton Boxborough Regional High School, *Principal Larry Dorey*  
Principal Larry Dorey presented his School Improvement Plan and answered questions from the Committee. Much of the work this year has been centered around the new scheduling model to be put in place next year. The best part of these changes is the opportunity for students to take classes at different times of the day, as opposed to always having the same class during first period, and so on.

Members were interested in and generally supportive of next year's piloting of a variety of lower stakes formative assessments embedded throughout the year rather than a formal mid-year week or finals week. A member asked that as the High School transitions to longer blocks, an attempt be made to try to increase the active learning and decrease the passive learning. This will be a big part of next year's professional learning, as it is a lot for some teachers. Larry is very proud of his leadership team and departments that brought forward this scheduling change request. It is based exclusively on being good for students. Equity and wellness were the major drivers. They will do a transition during the first week of school, then the rotating schedule. The SEED training and working with the A.D.L.'s World of Difference program will also continue to be exciting parts of next year. Eileen Zhang asked a few questions from the audience regarding the assessments.

Mr. Light thanked Larry for his extraordinary leadership that was obvious in the complicated process of changing the school schedule.

- 4.4. ABRSD 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report – *Dave Verdolino*

Dave Verdolino reported that projected FY19 revenue exceeds budget by \$491,356 and projected expenditures are under budget by \$848,080, for a projected net FY19 budget surplus of \$1,339,436. In response to a question, Dave explained the negative projection due to a utilities billing correction as an error that is being corrected. See slide 5. A member asked about revenue cash flow, and if revenue flows in evenly during the year. It does not. Regarding investing in the OPEB account, because no one can predict the market fluctuations, the advisor suggested dollar cost averaging by funding the OPEB account quarterly, which they do. Dave was asked if any financial news coming out now has a significant effect on the FY20 budget. He noted that revenue collections for the year for the state are running over a billion dollars over so this could be good news for us in June.

Acton Selectman David Martin spoke from the audience. It was clarified that if the Selectmen decide to call a Special Town Meeting within 45 days of a budget transfer to the new Stabilization Fund, it would be to disapprove of the School Committee's budget transfer.

- 4.5. Superintendent's End of Year Goals Report – *Peter Light*

The Superintendent reviewed his report, structured as a series of reflections on each of his five goals with links to corresponding documents. He considers evaluations as opportunities to ask "How can you continue to grow?".

Members appreciated the well-organized documents and helpful links. Paul Murphy said he was happy with the Superintendent's performance but he was disappointed this year in the area of outreach by the

School Committee. Paul offered to help the Superintendent and the Committee with broader outreach because the community will be asked for a lot to support the building project. The Committee needs to also connect with citizens that do not have school children. John Petersen agreed adding that the School Committee is responsible to everyone in the community, not just school parents. He stressed that the Committee needs to look hard at the revenue question and how it affects local property taxes and find an appropriate balance. Mary Brolin added that although outreach is an area of growth, Mr. Light has done a great job with other Board members and Acton and Boxborough leadership, and this is key and appropriate for this stage.

Diane reminded members that their forms are due to her (with copy to Beth) by May 28<sup>th</sup>. She will send them a memo with the form soon.

## 5. New Business – Votes

### 5.1. Recommendation to Authorize the Superintendent to Approve Fundraising in Anticipation of Accepting Gifts (Policy DDA) – *Peter Light*

#### 5.1.1. ABRHS Football Boosters Donation of Fitness Center Equipment – **VOTE**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to approve raising the funds for the High School Fitness Center.

#### 5.1.2. Blanchard School Outdoor Learning Space – **VOTE**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to approve raising the funds for the Blanchard Outdoor Learning Space.

## 6. Ongoing Business

### 6.1. Policy (First Read) – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

#### 6.1.1. (NEW) Reserves, File: DK

Amy reviewed the new draft policy. As noted on the draft, it has been reviewed by the Budget and Capital Improvement Subcommittees as well as the Acton and Boxborough Finance Committees. Feedback may be send to Amy by May 20. John Petersen suggested that instead of an upper target reserve level of 4 ½%, he'd like to see it at 8%. This would be a way to signal that we would rather see MGL raise the limit on E&D. One member thought the Finance Committees would get very nervous about doing that. She asked that it be run by both finance committees first if that change was going to be considered. John compromised and stated that it should go up to 5% at a minimum. Several other members agreed with keeping the original wording as a way to send an important message to our local community. One member agreed with John's proposal to go up to 5% given what committees around the country are allowed. They concluded with a brief discussion of bond ratings.

#### 6.1.2.(NEW) Capital Stabilization Fund, File: DP

Amy reviewed the proposed new policy. Like the new draft Stabilization Fund policy, it had been reviewed by a number of groups for comment, as noted on the document.

#### 6.1.3.School Committee Annual Organizational Meeting, File: BDA

Amy reviewed the proposed changes. The transition period would be helpful for an incoming Chairperson. Comments should be sent to Amy by May 20.

### 6.2. School Building Committee Update – *Mary Brolin*

#### 6.2.1.Meeting Updates: April 24, May 1

#### 6.2.2.Recommendation to Approve Revisions to School Building Committee Members' Titles changing Mary Brolin and Bob Evans to Community Members – **VOTE**

Adam Klein moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the revision to the School Building Committee Members' titles changing Mary Brolin and Bob Evans to community members.

#### 6.2.3.New ABRSC Debt Strategy Subcommittee

Diane announced that Michael Bo and John Petersen will join Finance Committee and Town finance personnel from both towns as well as the District's Finance Director, Dave Verdolino on the newly formed bond committee. The committee's charge is to explore bonding options for the new school building project in preparation for Special Town Meetings scheduled for mid-December 2019. Diane thanked Michael and John for volunteering to engage in this important work.

6.3. ABRSC Meeting Draft Schedule and Venue for 2019-2020

The workshop is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, July 16 and will be confirmed once the agenda is set. All members said, at this time, that they could attend on that date, as well as on Tuesday, August 6. If their plans change, members will tell the Chair and Beth asap.

A meeting may be added in April. Regarding the venue, Diane met with Acton TV and they are looking into the Memorandum of Agreement with the Town. It is not clear how becoming a K-12 region affects the contract. She will bring more information to the next meeting about possibly moving in September.

7. **Statement of Warrants** – The warrants were read and signed by the Committee.

8. **CONSENT AGENDA – VOTE**

8.1. Minutes of 3/21/19 School Committee Meeting as amended

8.2. Minutes of 4/11/19 School Committee Meeting as amended

8.3. Policy (Second Read)

8.3.1. Notice of Nondiscrimination, File: AC

8.3.1.1. Recommendation to approve that any policy that includes the Nondiscrimination clause will be updated with the link to Policy AC

8.3.2. Students Who Are Homeless: Enrollment Rights and Services, File: JFABD **HOLD**

8.3.3. (NEW) Educational Opportunities for Military Children, File: JFABE **HOLD**

8.3.4. (NEW) Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care, File: JFABF **HOLD**

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded it was unanimously,  
**VOTED:** to approve the consent agenda.

John Petersen held the three policies because he felt too much of what was included was procedure. Dawn Bentley agreed but explained that we need these policies in place for the coordinated program review that was done in May. While members had some interest in revising the policies, Peter Light counseled the committee that there was not enough time to properly revise the policies for the CPR. He suggested that the policies should be approved and reviewed next year.

Mary Brolin moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was,

**VOTED:** to approve the Students Who Are Homeless: Enrollment Rights and Services Policy, File: JFABD (YES: Baum, Bo, Brolin, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy NO: Petersen)

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was,

**VOTED:** to approve the Educational Opportunities for Military Children Policy, File: JFABE (YES: Baum, Bo, Brolin, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy NO: Petersen)

Mary Brolin moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was,

**VOTED:** to approve the Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care Policy, File: JFABF (YES: Baum, Bo, Brolin, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy NO: Petersen)

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see warrants and agenda with list of documents