



## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

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[www.abschools.org](http://www.abschools.org)

### Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

March 21, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

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

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### APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Liz Fowlks, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Vikram Parikh, Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebecca Wilson  
Members Absent: Tori Campbell  
Others: Peter Light, Sheri Matthews, Andrew Shen

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1. **CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

2. **CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - Adam Klein**

Members of the public who wished to watch the meeting online were invited to use Acton tv's youtube channel. Adam announced that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org

a. **Public Participation**

Per School Committee Policy BEDH, members of the public were invited to speak for up to 3 minutes.

Gary Kushner, Boxborough Finance Committee requested that the participation guidelines be changed. He suggested that the comprehensive energy report include how the Boardwalk Campus proposed energy savings would affect the School District given our net zero facility.

A Resource Force student asked the Committee to consider and pass their proposed climate change resolution, referring to it as a "high-level commitment to seek action for the future".

John Petersen supported Gary's request to change the public participation policy. He also noted that the current reserve level is not consistent with the School Committee policy.

b. **Superintendent's Update - Peter Light**

Congratulations to staff who just celebrated 20 years with the District. Prior to the June 6 School Committee meeting our retirees will be invited to attend a thank you reception. Mr. Light also spoke about School News, FY25 Budget (website is updated), Safety Measures for Solar Eclipse, Cartwheel Webinar-Helping Our Pre-Teens and Teens Thrive: Parenting Strategies for the Adolescent Years, and the Community Coffee with the Superintendent and School Committee Chairperson (March 23 at 9am). Leadership Searches are in progress for

the Athletic Director at High School and Junior High, and an Assistant Superintendent (AS) of Schools. The Superintendent will determine one candidate for the AS position that is then voted on by the School Committee at their meeting on April 4th.

3. **GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS (7:30)**

- a. Boardwalk Campus Energy Performance [Presentation Slides](#) - *Kate Crosby*  
Eversource's New Construction Design of the Year for Energy Excellence Award was presented to ABRSD's Boardwalk Campus and Arrowstreet Architecture and Design for their fully all-electric building with a carbon output that is 33% less than a typical new school in Massachusetts. The work was done on time and on budget, through the pandemic. Kate, our District Energy Manager, presented on the building's energy use intensity (EUI), the building's tight envelope and the geothermal system. Mr. Light noted that Kate is responsible for saving the District a significant amount over the years.

Members thanked Kate for her remarkable work and noted that there is a lot of interest currently in using geothermal energy. Other comments included:

- Sweeney Drywall of Boxborough did the drywall for the new building.
- Would a colder winter affect our efficiency? Because heat pumps do not freeze up and they retain efficiency, colder weather is not expected to pose a challenge.
- How does the tightness of the building affect CO2 levels? Calling this an important question, Kate explained that the building has a "spectacular" ventilation system. The mechanical ventilation sends old air out and it prewarms the new air to harvest that heat. Room thermostats all have CO2 level screens.
- In response to a comment that the top floor tended to get warm when hot outside, Kate investigated that with vendors. September had a challenging hot spell. Given the high humidity and heat, 76 degrees was to be expected and led to putting in a boiler instead of the last geothermal wells as the back up. Water returns to us at 55 degrees year round - the earth warms it in the winter and cools it in summer.

Regarding the "net zero" status, the solar panel and battery storage are still missing. Once the entire system is functioning, we will generate a lot of electricity that will go to the grid and then will buy it back in the winter. Our goal is net zero consumption but we will still have an electricity bill because the district does not own the system.

4. **ONGOING BUSINESS (7:50)**

- a. Recommendation to Approve Superintendent's [FY25 Final Budget and Assessments](#) - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*

- i. Recommended Budget Summary by [Administrative Code](#) and [Character Code](#)  
ii. Recommended Budget [Line Item Detail](#)

Mr. Light gave a brief review of the proposed budget. No updates have been made to the budget since the last School Committee meeting. The Treasurer will send the official notice to both towns after the vote. The Town of Acton vote is scheduled for April 30. If yes, the A budget continues to both Town Meetings to pass. If it does not pass, the B budget would be immediately voted on as the alternative budget. Boxborough anticipates needing an override

next year if the A Budget is approved this year. Adam reviewed the voting process required including a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote of all School Committee members.

Rebecca Wilson moved, Leela Ramachandran seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** that the Committee adopt the budget of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 as presented in the amount of **\$114,380,105**;

Which is reduced by estimated receipts and available funds in the following amounts:

- Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$16,091,731
- Anticipated State Transportation Aid in the amount of \$2,417,425;
- Anticipated State Charter School Aid in the amount of \$150,000;
- Anticipated Medicaid Reimbursement of \$215,000;
- Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$300,000;
- Estimated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$25,000;
- Estimated McKinney-Vento Transportation of \$150,000;

And transfers from the following District reserves:

- Excess & Deficiency Fund in the amount of \$0.00
- Capital Stabilization Fund in the amount of \$0.00.

For a net amount to be assessed to member towns in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton **\$79,070,675** (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$5,810,256 and an Operating Assessment of \$73,260,419); and

Boxborough **\$15,960,274** (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$1,080,560 and an Operating Assessment of \$14,879,714).

(YES: Bloomenthal, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

- b. Recommendation to Approve District Tuitions and Fees - [Memo](#) - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
- Vikram Parikh moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** To set the preschool tuition for 2024-25 at \$3,830 for half-day programming and \$7,450 for full-day programming.
  - Ben Bloomenthal moved, Vikram Parikh seconded and it was, **VOTED:** To set the full-day kindergarten tuition for 2024-25 at \$1,925. (NO: Kaja)
  - Vikram Parikh moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** To establish an activity at the junior and senior high schools of \$50 per year per student so that one-time payment of this fee each year provides access to all clubs and student activities within the school for the school year.

There may be some Academic Teams that charge additional fees as outlined in the student handbook.

- Ben Bloomenthal moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: To set the high school student parking fee at \$250 per year.
- Vikram Parikh moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was **VOTED**: To set the junior high school and high school student athletic participation fee at \$350 per sport with an additional \$250 fee charged for ice hockey and alpine skiing with a family cap of \$1,200 per family.  
(NO: Schwartz)

c. Recommendation to Approve the Student Opportunity Act Plan (Second Read) - **VOTE** - *Dr. Deborah Bookis*

i. [Student Opportunity Act Plan](#) and [Memo](#)

Mr. Light presented in Dr. Bookis' absence due to illness. The MA DESE Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan was established to address the education for all students. It directs districts to address a subset of initiatives, focused on evidence-based programs and strategies that improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students and focus on rapidly improving outcomes of students with low academic performance. For the 2024 SOA Plan, our Leadership Team identified chronic absenteeism as the priority area. The majority (57.7%) of survey respondents indicated that, in order to address chronic absenteeism, the District focus area should be on developing partnerships with students and their families. While the SOA was designed to provide more funding to schools, because AB is in the "hold harmless" category, we will not receive additional funding. Members discussed how to reach the goals. Adding the nurses to the groups being polled was appreciated, as well as understanding that the reasons for chronic absenteeism may be difficult for families to talk about. This is related to social emotional wellbeing. We need to create environments where kids feel safe to come into and responses are consistent.

Leela Ramachandran moved, Vikram Parikh seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the Student Opportunity Act Plan as presented.

(This vote followed the discussion of the Conant Statement of Interest.)

d. Discussion of MA School Building Authority Statement of Interest (SOI) for the Conant Elementary School - *Peter Light*

i. Statement of Interest [Memo](#)

ii. [2023 Statement of Interest](#)

An SOI has been submitted for Conant every year since 2016. In 2023, MSBA "short-listed" Conant for consideration and completed a site visit. Hosting a site visit can be considered one of the last steps before being invited into the MSBA process. It is possible that if the District submits an SOI again this year, we would be accepted into the process because MSBA has documented the need. Members were asked for input on the education and financial considerations around submitting an SOI again. There is concern about asking the community to support this right now, as well as how it would look to the MSBA if we are accepted and

then withdraw. The cost to build will only increase over time. Bond rates are also high right now. Mr. Light suggested that if the Committee submits, they should expect to be selected. A working group is expected to be put together next year to look at how we want to structure our schools, particularly elementary schools. Adam stated that there has been strong feedback from the towns' boards and committees and the community not to shutter the Conant School. A debt exclusion vote would be needed if the project moves forward. Over the next nine years, elementary enrollment is expected to increase approximately 15-20 students per year. Members discussed the top priority of getting the override passed this Spring. Mr. Light agreed that that is the top concern, however he suggested that the second priority should be passing an override in Boxborough next year (just as significant regarding the impact on schools) and then a Conant SOA should be third. Completing the plan for structuring schools, including Conant, and waiting out this year for the SOI would be logical and probably favorable to the MSBA and the community.

There was consensus from the Committee not to submit an SOA this year.

- e. School Committee Communication Goal Update - *Adam Klein*  
Community Coffee was held. It is hoped more people will attend on Saturday. Several members and administrators added Strengthening Community and Police Partnerships in Boxborough recently. We need a better defined way to communicate between the Boxborough police and the schools. Becca visited the Senior Center along with David Martin (Acton Selectboard) and Steve Noone (Acton Fincom) and had a great discussion. Seniors would like to visit the Boardwalk campus. Yanxin held office hours recently and was impressed with how people are thinking about the future of our schools. Office hours are on the homepage and the budget page.
  
- f. Subcommittee and Member Reports
  - i. Policy Subcommittee - *Liz Fowlks, March 12*  
Members discussed the refocus of priorities for the remainder of the year. The committee will address the students' Resource Force proposal at their next meeting and have invited Kate Crosby, district energy manager to attend.
  - ii. Capital Subcommittee - *Ben Bloomenthal, March 13*  
Updates were provided on ongoing projects. Mark Hamel updated on PDB control system project. Brendan Hearn spoke about tennis court repairs, High School chem storage and Admin building repairs. The Hagar Well project and the cell phone tower were discussed.
  - iii. Budget Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, March 18*  
Members of the finance committees from both towns attended the last meeting and budget projections for the next three years were reviewed, in an effort to anticipate costs regarding creating structural change. None of the options are short term budget solutions. Members are committed to long term fiscal responsibility, and collaboration with the fincoms and Select Boards from both towns, and want to ensure we make the best choices after thorough research and reflection. Members of the community were encouraged to contact the subcommittee members and be part of this collaborative process. Focusing on the State and Federal governments to provide a more fair share of the fiscal budget to support children and

families was encouraged. Check out the ABRSD website for the budget info, including short videos by Mr. Light. ActonTV's YouTube channel has a wealth of videos to highlight the effort dedicated to the budget process as well.

- g. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
  - i. Approval ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 2/10/24
  - ii. Recommendation to approve \$25,000 check for the fourteenth installment from Dragonfly Theater to Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
  - iii. Recommendation to approve Blanchard PTF \$95,580.87 donation to Blanchard Playground Project

Leela Ramachandran moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda.

- h. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve 3/21/24 - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*  
Liz Fowlks moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the statement of warrants (see memo language).

The ABRSC summer workshop is being planned for June. Members will be polled on dates. Nate Levinson is being considered as a presenter, author of Smarter Schools. Smarter Budgets. He is former Superintendent as well as School Board member.

Mr. Light welcomed our new Elementary School Resource Officer, Detective Ana Dapkas.

## 5. **ADJOURN**

At 8:55 p.m., Vikram Parikh moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC meeting.

## **FYI -**

Acton and Boxborough Election Calendars

NEXT MEETING: April 4, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Administration Building Auditorium

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summaries, Boardwalk Campus Energy slides, Recommendation for the FY25 ABRSD Final Budget and Assessments Vote memo and slides, Recommended Budget Summary by administrative and character codes and line item detail, budget presentation slides, Recommended District Tuition and Fees memo, Student Opportunity Act Plan and memo, SOA slides, Statement of Interest memo, Draft ABRSC meeting minutes of 2/10/24, Dragonfly Gift memo from B. Haan, Blanchard PTF Gift check, statement of warrants memo 3/21/24, election calendars