

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

Virtual Public Meeting

To attend: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

February 11, 2021

7:00 p.m. Open Meeting

8:30 p.m. \*Executive Session

To preregister for Public Comment (required):

[https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_Xl4DKB8BQuOts6sCqMaigg](https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Xl4DKB8BQuOts6sCqMaigg)

(pre-registration must be submitted 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting, see memo)

---

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (7:05 p.m.), Diane Baum (9:15 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy (7:04 p.m.), Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: Diane Baum

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

---

**1. Call to Order**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

She noted that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar with the following 10 members in attendance via zoom: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (to arrive soon), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy (to arrive soon), John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. Diane Baum was expected later. Per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The Chair stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

**a. Chairperson's Welcome - Tessa McKinley**

- i. Review of Suspension of Public Participation Policy BEDH
- ii. Current Public Participation process for this meeting

In an ongoing effort to make meetings as secure as possible, members of the public were asked to view the meeting using Acton tv's youtube channel (found at the top of the agenda). Those who wished to comment during the meeting, were asked to register 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting using the link also found at the top of the agenda. After confirmation, they would be sent a zoom attendee link to use for the meeting.

Adam Klein noted that the current procedure satisfies the public participation policy (currently suspended) and moved that the policy be reinstated and the procedures be added. John Petersen seconded the motion.

It was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** in support of the motion.

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

- b. **ABRHS Student Rep Update - Rhik Mazumder**  
Rhik shared his thoughts about the advisory that has been added to the hybrid program as part of the State requirement. He felt like it was an interruption to people's schedules and not very helpful. He would prefer an added study period. He also noted how exhausting all the screen time is for students this year.
- c. **Public Participation**  
Scott Smyers read the remainder of a citizen's email that was shared at the previous meeting but was cut off at 3 minutes. He felt it was important for all to hear the conclusion. Adam Klein read an email from the Social Justice Task Force of Acton Congregational Church voicing appreciation to the Committee. Nora Shine read a statement regarding the mascot decision.
- d. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light**  
Mr. Light announced that Joanie Dean will be the next Principal of the High School.

## 2. PRESENTATION

- a. **RJGJHS Social Action Club - Sara Karp, Sneha Iyer**

Students Sara Karp and Sneha Iyer presented a statement from the Junior High's Social Action Club denouncing the "hate-filled acts" that occurred at the recent School Committee meetings. The letter was signed by 380 students. (Names were not included on the posted letter due to student privacy.) Kyra Cook and Evelyn Abayaah-Issah were deeply honored by this gesture and thanked the students.

## 3. ONGOING BUSINESS

- a. **Consent Agenda - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**
  - i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 2/8/21 – VOTE (next meeting)
  - i. Recommendation to Approve Donations to the Student Assistance Fund - VOTE - Peter Light

Adam Klein moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve the donations to the Student Assistance Fund with gratitude. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

This was especially appreciated given the terrible apartment fire that had just occurred in Boxborough.

- b. **Pandemic School Planning - Update & Next Steps - Peter Light**

Mr. Light presented Spring 2021 Return to School Considerations, including survey data, in an effort to gather initial feedback around goals and the planning process. He covered: the current vaccine rollout plan, pooled and rapid testing, and the stakeholder perception survey done in February with families, staff and educators. Planning considerations – educational, operational and other (DESE, medical advisories, and families' commitment to the in-person model) were mentioned.

Members discussed the timelines presented: aggressive, moderate, conservative and staggered. Comments included:

- Consider the most aggressive timeline that is appropriate, prioritizing our youngest and special education students.
- There is also concern about getting older students (high school) back in.
- The Remote Learning Program will continue all year unless there is capacity and families want their children to return.
- A moderate timeline may be better. The risk is improving now.
- Is there a plan to keep kids engaged if they are out on quarantine? (This is in progress.)
- The evolving nature of the plans is appreciated, and students should return asap, but we need to be sure the day to day school operations can be managed appropriately with an aggressive timeline. (The shift back to school is coming and the administration knows it will mean more work, as well as another shift when students return again in the fall.)
- It's important to get students off their screens and back in school but it is contingent on a perception of safety. What if many students are positive but asymptomatic and when they return we have many more that need to quarantine?
- A member "honored the urgency" to have children return, but also the teachers' safety. She hoped as many as possible could be vaccinated.
- Attention must be paid to students' mental health and safety when they return. She asked what experts are saying, and specifically about 3 feet of distancing. Mr. Light agreed, but reiterated that they have still had no cases of in-school transmission. It has mainly been within families and some cases with hockey players recently.
- Could we be creative and think about bringing in special education students first? Students in quarantine have had a especially tough time.
- Transportation is a complicated issue in all of these shifts.
- How are changes in sports decided? This involves the MIAA, EEOC and Dept of Public Health. Sports engage kids and Steve Martin and his coaches have done a great job.
- Extracurricular activities are extremely important to older kids' health.

c. **Recommendation to Approve ABRSD Preliminary FY22 Budget - VOTE -**

*Peter Light, Dave Verdolino*

Mr. Light and Mr. Verdolino presented their recommended budget, including \$48,000 of additional deferred expenses and \$100,000 of additional E&D usage from what was proposed at the meeting on February 8<sup>th</sup>. Reserve usage would then total \$1,245,000 of E&D, \$200,000 of Transportation Stabilization and \$150,000 of Capital Stabilization for a grand total of \$1,595,000. This would put the increase at 2.90%, Acton assessment increase at 2.97% and the Boxborough assessment increase at 4.64%.

John Petersen reported that the Acton Leadership Group met that morning to review the revenues and expenses of the ABRSD and Town of Acton based on

current budget information. Their objective is to complete the ALG plan prior to the final school budget vote on 18 March. The current ALG spreadsheet shows a gap between revenues and expenses which, after incorporating planned use of reserves, is approximately \$1 million. In the current spreadsheet the Acton school assessment increases by 3.21% (including new debt).

The gap between revenues and expenses must be closed either by reducing expenses or by increasing reserve use. ALG consensus is that there will be no operational override in FY22. There remains considerable uncertainty about the level of federal revenue that will flow to Town and School in FY21 and FY22. If additional federal funding occurs, this will improve FY21 financials and/or FY22 projections or both.

Comments included:

- Reductions are appreciated but there is concern about expanding the use of E&D without knowing how it can be replenished in the future. It was agreed that this should not become a habit.
- Reducing the budget by using reserves sets up the same problem the next year, but worse. FY23 will be challenging.
- It would take a cut of approximately \$700,000 to get Boxborough's assessment below 4%. Small adjustments would even be good.
- Acton Fincom member Christine Russell stated that she felt good about this budget process.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District regular operating budget for the fiscal year of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 be preliminarily set at **\$99,719,222**, (an increase of 2.90%) and that budget would be funded by member towns to be preliminarily assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

**Acton \$67,534,818** (an increase of 2.97%) and

**Boxborough \$12,685,190** (an increase of 4.64%);

Offset by use of E&D Reserve in the amount of **\$1,245,000**;

With the remainder accounted for by other sources of revenues to be detailed in the final budget vote.

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

d. **EDCO Collaborative Update - Peter Light**

- i. Recommendation to Terminate EDCO Collaborative as of June 30, 2022  
- **VOTE** - Peter Light

At the meeting on February 8<sup>th</sup>, the School Committee voted to request that the EDCO Board initiate termination proceedings to limit financial liability to the District. The EDCO Board met on February 10<sup>th</sup> and voted unanimously to initiate the proceedings. Each member district must now vote to terminate the

Collaborative as of June 30, 2022. A majority of member districts must vote in favor of termination in order to proceed.

Adam Klein moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call**: to terminate the EDCO Collaborative as of June 30, 2022. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

e. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

John Petersen reported that at their recent meeting, the Health Insurance Trust voted to increase rates 7% for next year, which was higher than expected. He also reported that the Capital Subcommittee affirmed the FY22 budget numbers that have been used, although there are concerns about out years, particularly with respect to the Capital Stabilization fund.

f. **FYI**

4. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** (*Note: Diane Baum arrived at the executive session.*)

At 9:15 p.m., Tessa stated the need for an executive session pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee. She stated that the Committee would not return to Open Session.

Adam Klein made the motion. Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously **VOTED by roll call** to enter the executive session. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

**NEXT MEETINGS (via zoom):**

ABRSC: March 4 (Comprehensive FY22 Budget & Program Presentations) at 7:00 p.m.  
March 18 (Open FY22 Budget Hearing) at 7:00 p.m.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION (FYI)**

- a. **FY22 Budget Schedule**, voted 11/19/20
- b. **FY21 School Committee Meeting Schedule**
- c. **Acton 2021 Annual Election Calendar**
- d. **Boxborough 2021 Annual Election Calendar & Candidate's Checklist**
- e. **Suicide Prevention Training** - Click here [QPR Training Flyer](#) for details and to sign up online. Next one: Feb 24 at 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.