

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

Virtual Public Meeting

May 20, 2021

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

6:30 p.m. Executive Session

7:00 p.m. Business Meeting

To preregister for Public Comment (required):

https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_sii3RWR2QagOaFKKeuOoNg

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

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (6:44 p.m.), Diane Baum (6:38 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: Nora Shine

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley (7:12 p.m.), Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino (7:12 p.m.)

1. Call to Order (6:30)

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

She stated that the meeting was being conducted remotely via Zoom per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. The following members were in attendance in the auditorium: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (came later), Diane Baum (came later), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. Nora Shine was absent.

In an ongoing effort to make meetings as secure as possible, members of the public were instructed 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. These procedures are now posted with our Public Participation policy BEDH. This meeting was recorded and posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

2. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Tessa McKinley stated the need for an Executive Session to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21(a) purpose (3): to discuss strategy with respect to litigation because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee. She said that the members expected to return to open session at 7:00 p.m.

Amy Krishnamurthy made the motion and it was seconded by Adam Klein. The Committee unanimously **VOTED by roll call** to enter executive session.

(YES: Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Tso, Wang)

The Committee returned to Open Meeting at 7:11 p.m.

3. **RETURN TO BUSINESS MEETING (7:11)**

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

Tessa repeated her opening statement for those members of the public who did not hear it prior to the executive session. Voice voting would be done as usual because all members were in person in the auditorium. In addition, with the changing guidance and lifting of the emergency order by the State, the Committee expects to welcome the public to the June 10th meeting back in the auditorium with no zoom. Please check the details when the agenda is posted.

i. Results of the Boxborough Annual Election –

Adam Klein was thanked for serving for another term.

ii. Recommendation to Approve \$10,000 Acton Boxborough Student Activities Fund (ABSASF) Donation to the ABRSD - **VOTE**

ABSASF members Jim Kirkman, Taylor Sahagian and Abigail Dennison presented the annual donation. Marie Altieri noted that it would have been easy for ABSAF to say they could not help the schools this year due to the pandemic and all of the restrictions, but instead they got creative and it was very much appreciated. Their spring newsletter and flower sale were also enjoyed by members of the Committee.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the ABSAF donation with gratitude.

b. **ABRHS Student Rep Update - next meeting**

c. **Public Participation - none**

d. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light**

Mr. Light reported that there have been zero cases (students or staff) of covid over the past two weeks in the in-person learning program. Also as of May 20th, 1,147 high school students (63%) have received at least one dose of the vaccine. Members were pleased with the quick adjustments to the graduation ceremony based on how last minute all of the health guidance was coming out from the state. RJG Principal Andrew Shen will take a new position in the Central Office as the Director of Special Projects effective July 1. Jim Marcotte will be the Interim RJG Principal for FY22.

John Petersen read a statement regarding May being Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month and expressed appreciation for the Asian representation and voices on the School Committee for most of the past decade. "As a school community, we face the same challenges that America does – to properly recognize and celebrate our large and diverse Asian American membership and to provide a safe and supportive environment in which we can all learn and grow together."

Angie Tso thanked John for the statement and noted that there are currently 15 Pacific Islanders in Congress. She urged students to step up and get involved.

4. **PRESENTATIONS - none**

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Policy - *Diane Baum*

- i. Evaluation of the Instructional Program, File: IL (combined with District Program Assessments, File: ILBA) - First Read

Although there is no legal mandate for these policies, and mechanisms are in place for program evaluations many of which are mandatory (MCAS, ACCESS testing, DESE's Tiered Focus Monitoring program, and SPEDPACs) this policy augments the state and federal policies. The new policy speaks to 1) the School Committee's belief that the greatest power for continuous improvement in educational systems lives at the local level with local accountability provisions that complement state and federal programs and policies, and 2) equity is a central piece of improvement work and important lens for understanding data, and 3) a call for metrics, accountability and transparency without tying the hands of leadership to specific indicators which may change over time.

In response to a request to define "equity" in the policy, Diane explained that not everyone gets the same thing, but they should get what they need for equity in educational delivery and outcome. It is a circular model, similar to reverse engineering. The upcoming strategy presentation will address the need to identify the uniqueness of each student.

While the policy states that outcomes regarding progress will be reported on annually, members hope that this includes the general public and the Committee.

- ii. Providing Funds for the Schools, File: DDA, to be revised as Public Gifts to the Schools, File: KCD - First Read

Diane thought a lot about the phrase "with gratitude" that is often included when voting a gift. "It captures our deep appreciation of the work and generosity of private organizations to enrich our students' public educational experiences." Subcommittee members felt it was empowering to encode the idea that equity requires aligning systems with community needs. The intent of this policy is to consider the tipping point where an enrichment program or activity becomes an equity issue. Diane described it as "a quest for everyone to engage in the equity work. It's messy but necessary." The draft will be shared again with the PTO Co-chairs for their feedback. The subcommittee and specifically Diane Baum were thanked for their dedication to making this revised policy happen after several years of discussion. Additional comments may be sent to Diane before the next policy subcommittee meeting on June 9th.

6. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. **ABRSD Strategy 2021-2026 - VOTE** - *Peter Light*

In response to a large amount of feedback and questions that came in the day of the meeting, Mr. Light created a presentation to supplement the information. This process began when the District adopted a Long Range Strategic Plan and Mission/Vision/Values statement in 2017. Three overarching goals were identified, and Annual District Goals focused on those areas. Six overarching themes resulted and were included in Mr. Light's Report of Entry Findings in January 2019. From

February to October he worked with the School Committee and Leadership Team to identify top priorities from his Entry Plan and then develop those priorities into a Draft Strategy. A Beliefs Statement to Guide Implementation was developed. When the pandemic hit in Spring 2020, much work was paused/slowed from March 2020 to March 2021. Leadership consulted with the Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC). In April 2021, feedback was solicited from the DEI Family Advisory, and the School Committee, which led to the revised draft which the Committee is asked to adopt.

The Strategic Objectives are the four overarching outcomes that the District hopes to achieve. These include: Engaged Learning, Inclusive Practices, Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes, and Social-emotional Learning (SEL). Mr. Light explained that they don't want to develop the key indicators until input is received from the School Committee on the strategy. Each initiative will need an action plan. A goal is to have the strategy in place by the end of June. While the Administration wants to preserve the uniqueness of each of the schools, they all need to "be in the same waterway" and align with the strategies. Timelines for the School Improvement Plans are going to be extended this year because the strategy is just being finished.

Comments from the Committee included:

- The justice tree (slide 17) was meaningful to the Committee. The individual talents of each child must be considered when it comes to equitable opportunities and outcomes. Regarding increasing access for all kids, a member asked, "How many students with disabilities are accessing advanced classes? We should raise the bar for all of our students."
- Justice doesn't mean taking away from someone to give to another.
- "Does this mean students don't need all the prerequisites to take Advance Placement classes?" Mr. Light replied that research says prerequisites are not a good indicator of success, due to the bias that goes into prerequisites and grades. Some students develop later than others and if they are tracked into lower classes, they will often stay there. We don't want to create a wall to keep kids out. We want to figure out a way to include more kids in the higher level classes. It is not about lowering levels. We want to find ways to increase, not decrease, opportunities for students. One reason we want to build out MTSS is to provide universal access at the early levels. We want prerequisites to enhance students' experiences, not deter them.

Adam Klein moved to approve the District Strategy as proposed. Amy Krishnamurthy seconded the motion. Discussion continued.

- "Is it true that some differences are not amenable?" Mr. Light replied that yes some are but we need to find ways to maximize the opportunities. In an ideal world, Districts would have an infinite amount of money, but in reality, they have to maximize values in terms of how education is provided.
- "If we don't have 50-50 male/female ratio in a class, is that a problem?" Mr. Light replied that we would not restrict more of the dominant group from joining the class, but we would ask "are there barriers that exist that prevent smaller group from entering?" We want children to see themselves when

they're young in these roles. We want to be sure we are not taking away from the majority.

- “Should this vote be postponed to the next meeting, to provide a little more clarity and the slides to the parents who expressed concern?” It was pointed out that if the goal is to have the document approved by the end of school, there is not enough time to make changes and continue the discussion.
- The “Engaged Learning - Key Ideas” slide was appreciated although a member asked for it “in laymen’s terms”. A number of emails expressed confusion about the material in the memo. Members considered whether to postpone the decision. A member stated that “It’s important for us as representatives of the community to speak up now that we know there is a lack of understanding.” Another member felt that the presentation showed clearly that the Strategy was not new or rushed, but it should be communicated more clearly.
- A member advocated for voting because so much community feedback was received and delaying the vote implies that more feedback is desired and more changes can be made. There will be time to provide feedback during the many steps that will be involved, but it needs to be voted right away. Agreeing on the strategy is only a starting point.
- Noting that the SEED training teaches you to speak up if you are uncomfortable, a member expressed frustration and concern about the number of emails that implied that a student with a disability who is not being successful, just isn’t working hard enough. Another member added that “we need to dispel the myth of effort in relation to achievement.”
- In response to a question, Mr. Light explained that Debbi Dixson is working with a team on the topic of disproportionality, which is when you have predictable outcomes that are skewed. One area has been identifying the root cause analysis for students being identified as needing special education and general education services. The student data is being looked at much more deeply, in order to be able to provide support in a timely fashion. This root cause analysis led the Administration to propose MTSS to address this issue, not lowering the bar, but increasing supports so the bar is raised.

The Committee **VOTED** in favor to approve the District Strategy as proposed.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen
NO: Wang ABSTAINED: Tso)

- b. **Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Revised Plan - VOTE - Peter Light**
Two concerns about MTSS after the last meeting were: 1. Linking it to Classroom assistants’ funding. 2. Strong desire for more direct support to students. This secondary proposal was shared with the budget subcommittee on Monday, and the Administration met with all but one elementary school to share this new version. There was a general sense of approval, however the two concerns above remained. The team decided to unlink the proposal to assistants and instead link it to the next ESSR funding. All Day Kindergarten was incorporated into the analysis as well leading to .003% increase per year starting in FY23.

This will have budget implications for future years so it is in School Committee's purview to decide whether to move forward. While the version proposed at the last meeting tried to accomplish this without budgetary impact, the Administration feels so strongly that they brought a revised version back again. Mr. Light added that they want to do a full budgetary analysis by hiring consultants next year.

A member asked what else could show up in the future that would affect the budget? Budget subcommittee members talked about future student populations and concluded that the biggest factor is not likely to appear in the near term. This was considered a low risk compared to the benefit of this program. As enrollment decreases some opportunities will come up, particularly at the High School.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the Superintendent's request to add the positions as detailed with the understanding that there is no increase to the FY22 budget.

A member appreciated the urgency of including the coaches/specialist and All Day Kindergarten. Dave Verdolino stated that after the ESSR money is gone, we hope the remaining costs will be melded into the base budget starting in FY23.

- c. **Superintendent Annual Evaluation - Tessa McKinley**
 - i. Final Report on Status of FY21 Goals - *Peter Light*
 - ii. The Public was invited to provide input on the Superintendent's evaluation. Please send it to TMckinley@abschools.org and copy BPetr@abschools.org by June 4.

Tessa asked members to keep in mind that it has been an extraordinary year due to the pandemic and Mr. Light's evaluation will reflect that.

Mr. Light reviewed his memo noting how ambitious some of the goals had been. Some were met and some were not. The pandemic affected every one of our staff members – Food Services offered thousands of community meals, Operations Staff made sure everything was clean and ready, the Transportation Department planned for changing bus capacity and new routes. The Nursing Staff worked tirelessly to keep us all healthy. This is all in addition to the teaching and learning issues. This has all been the focus of this year.

The overarching strategy for the evaluation document is that selected evidence of completion is provided for each goal. For each action step, an overview is provided. The professional practice goals did not have a lot of evidence so that is a narrative. Mr. Light is working with incoming staff on entrance plans. Questions may be addressed to Mr. Light or Tessa. Tessa will do a summative evaluation from all members' forms for presentation and a vote at the meeting on June 17th.

John Petersen noted that Mr. Light's new EDCO leadership role is a great example of his performance, as well as setting up the Remote Learning Program as a brand new school. This was a huge and very successful accomplishment.

d. **Budget Update - Dave Verdolino**

i. FY21 Q3 Report

The Budget Subcommittee reviewed all of the material before the meeting. Things are looking better in Q3 than in Q2. The Q3 projected variance at Year End is estimated at a surplus of \$963,021. The projected E&D balance on 7/1/21 is estimated to be \$3,147,853 (3.16%). Regarding revenue, although the transportation reimbursement was late, it was more than expected so it was good news. As result, see transfer request below.

ii. Recommendation to Transfer from FY2021 State Transportation Reimbursements the sum of \$200,000 to the District's Transportation Stabilization Fund - **VOTE**

This was previously discussed by the Committee and was a result of the decrease in the FY21 cost of transportation (driver salaries and fuel) and increase in State Transportation aid.

John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to Transfer from FY2021 State Transportation Reimbursements the sum of \$200,000 to the District's Transportation Stabilization Fund.

iii. EDCO Update – *Peter Light*

EDCO will cease operations as of June 30, 2021 and will continue to exist for one additional year as required. Typically, the District would pay \$16,000 tuition per year, but because there is no student revenue coming in, we will pay approximately \$31,000 next year. In addition, AB's share of the accelerated payment of liabilities is approximately \$162,000, payable by June 30, 2021. Mr. Light will keep the Committee informed.

iv. FY22 Update – *Dave Verdolino*

Universal free lunch has been extended through next year. Although the Town Meetings are later in the year, it does not give a significant advantage to know the state numbers more clearly because we don't see a large enrollment driven factor for transportation.

v. Acton Leadership Group - Boxborough Leadership Forum Updates

John Petersen reported on ALG. The Acton Leadership Group consists of representatives of the Town, the ABRSD and the Acton Finance Committee. The purpose of the group is to agree on a balance between revenues and expenses. The ALG plan agreement is by consensus.

At the 5/13/21 meeting, Steve Barrett reported that the debt for the North Acton Fire Station appears to have been double counted (included in both municipal budget and as a separate debt line item). The ALG spreadsheet will be modified to bring it into balance for Town Meeting.

There are three approaches to updating the ALG plan for Acton Town Meeting to account for the \$454K change.

1. Lower expected revenue from Local Receipts (for example motor vehicle excise receipts)
2. Reduce the use of Free Cash
3. Reduce the Tax Levy

Members were invited to comment on their preference so that Amy and John can properly represent the perspective of the School Committee at the next ALG meeting. Tessa stated that as a Boxborough member, there was an understanding that we need to reduce use of E&D. They did what they could to help and Boxborough's assessment could have been lower if decisions were made differently.

e. **Consent Agenda - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

- i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of the 4/15/21 meeting and 5/6/21 workshop
 - ii. Recommendation to Approve \$1,500 grant from Emerson Hospital to R.J.Grey JH to offset the fruit and vegetable garden project
 - iii. Recommendation to Approve \$2,000 grant from Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation to AB Community Education's summer day program
 - iv. Recommendation to Approve \$7,000 grant from AB United Way to AB Community Ed Summer Day Program scholarships
- Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the consent calendar with gratitude.

f. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

- i. Building Committee - Adam Klein
A very exciting topping off ceremony was held on Tuesday. Progress has started on the Boardwalk. Access will be cut off most of the summer. The Naming Committee will begin soon. The Building Committee has a timeline to vote the name in September.
- ii. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - Tessa McKinley

Tessa McKinley moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously **VOTED**: see motion in the memo

- iii. FYI

7. **Adjourn**

At 9:53 p.m. Kyra Cook moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda