

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

December 3, 2020

To attend open meeting: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505>

7:00 p.m. Open Meeting

To call in: 312 626 6799

8:00 p.m. Executive Session

Live streaming: <http://actontv.org/on-demand/livestream/government>

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: none

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

1. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

She noted that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar with all eleven committee members participating by zoom. 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.

1. Chairperson's Welcome - Tessa McKinley

2. Public Participation

Dave Lunger felt that the mascot decision was rushed and asked that the Committee do their due diligence and try to bring the community back together. He urged members to include the community in making the new decision, or to rescind it. Scott Smeyers asked whether the name "Colonial" could be kept and the mascot image changed. He suggested that the missing historical information be added. It was confirmed that a former student was the original submitter of the proposal.

3. Superintendent's Update – Peter Light

Mr. Light thanked the Gates School staff and administration for their quick changing of dismissal procedures in response to a nearby serious train accident. It did not involve any school students or staff. The annual inclement weather procedures memo is going out tomorrow. If in-person school cannot be held due to weather, the involved cohort will move to a synchronous, remote model for that day.

The High School will return to in-person on Monday after two weeks of being fully remote. Many parents are asking for all schools to go fully remote, while many are asking all to go in-person. While health measures continue to decline rapidly, we have not seen cases of in-school transmission. For that reason, Mr. Light and the Administration will continue to monitor the data and remain in the current model for now.

If numbers spike in the community and things change, the district will give families as much notice as possible.

4. **PRESENTATION**

Superintendent Goals 2020-2021 - First Read - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light began the review of his new goals by describing the current singular focus as “pandemic school”. Because this focus continues, he proposed four goals instead of five. One is focused on improving student learning, one on professional practice and two are additional district-wide goals. Possible action steps were included for discussion but they are not complete. Mr. Light asked for feedback so he can revise and finalize the language, then he will add final action steps for review and final approval at the meeting on December 17.

Mr. Light noted that if the school buildings had not shut down in the spring, work would have been progressing on the draft strategy. The pandemic, however, has provided a unique opportunity to “get off the dance floor and look down from the balcony”. He expects the strategy to evolve over the school year as we process what has been learned during the pandemic. This is not a one year document, but a five year view.

Committee comments included:

- It was appreciated how the goals were tied it in to what the School Committee is responsible for.
- Angie offered that one definition of diversity is “showing a great deal of variety”. One difference between today’s kids and pre-internet kids is that today they can build common ground immediately due to social media even if they’ve never met and live far apart from each other. Does this increase or decrease variety? If our goal is to build diversity and inclusiveness, she asked how we will define diversity and how will this core value be considering during the hiring process. Mr. Light replied that diversity isn’t something we can control. We focus on trying to understand our stakeholders and the diversity and how the schools can be inclusive for people with different backgrounds and belief systems.
- Tessa suggested that diversity is really just diversity of thought and experience, based on a presentation at the recent MASC conference.
- Members were reminded that they will evaluate the Superintendent in about five months on these goals, so it is important to look closely at them.
- Diane suggested that they consider what is intentional, due to current conditions, and what can be carried forward beyond the pandemic. Mr. Light replied that a professional survey firm has been engaged to design surveys to send to families, staff, community to see what they think has worked well and not so well. Family coffees and parent conferences via zoom have allowed more parents to participate, for example. Mr. Light described this as the “greatest period of educational innovation” right now due to necessity resulting from the pandemic.
- She asked about unfinished work from last year after the March 13th shutdown, especially around the student learning goal that had reading work left to do. A presentation on this will take place at the next School Committee meeting.
- What is the status of the vision statement that was in draft form and the district strategy goal based on the work with the Mid-Atlantic Consortium?

- Should cultural competence be added to the Long Range Strategic Plan and what would it look like? This is an important skill that we want our students to graduate with. The District may partner with Portrait of a Graduate on this.
- The addition of families into the student learning goal this year was appreciated.
- Regarding the professional practice goal 2.1, and the district strategy 3.1, in this challenging year to have equitable outcomes, why choose the inclusive practice and not the outcome one? Mr. Light replied that regarding equitable outcomes, the District just finished the first district wide diagnostic system which K-8 students took for the first time. This will provide one consistent platform for comparisons. Regarding stakeholders, we need to listen to all of them to avoid making suppositions. The action steps might include some practice in the engagement or rewording of the goal.
- How are our students with special needs included in goals 1.5 and 2.5? The Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) has been active for years and is an excellent resource for listening to this group of students. They are part of our Special Educator Director hiring group, as well as other families.
- In our current economic situation, how will the disruption fold into the multiyear plan? How will you integrate that thinking into your goal setting? See item 1.5 which was added for this reason.
- Yebin would like to see more accountability and measurable specifics in the document, particularly when it comes time to evaluate. In his opinion, increasing student engagement is not ultimate goal, it is a tool. Mr. Light responded that incorporating diagnostic results, and becoming more consistent within the schools, will really personalize the supports students need. He and Deborah Bookis could give an overview of this tool to the Committee.
- Tessa briefly explained the goals process and superintendent assessment, especially for the newer members. She noted that there are a lot of things on the evaluation form that Committee members don't have direct insight into.
- To Yebin's comment, Mr. Light responded that understanding some of the history in the district might be helpful. For several years, AB partnered with Challenge Success, a program for high performing districts with lots of stress. A striking point that came out was that students were "doing school work" – but they weren't passionate about it. We do want to increase student learning but the biggest lever that our district can use to get the best results, is to increase school engagement. Schools have not changed over 50 years, while society has changed significantly. We need to think how schools can adjust and bring engagement in. While it is an intermediate step, it's what is closest to what we are ultimately looking for.
- John added that it's important that the goals and strategies not stop with engagement but continue and ideally end with "this is what we will measure to show that..." It's a true dilemma because it would leave out things like curiosity.
- Mr. Light asked how the schools can help create a dialogue around community involvement and engagement. Community outreach is needed to do some mending as we come out of the mascot decision.
- Regarding the desire for longitudinal data, we have to start by establishing a first year baseline for students. Mr. Light stressed that our desired outcomes are not

just about literacy, math, etc. They are also about teaching students how to be lifelong learners and while you cannot quantify that, it is critical.

- Nora asked that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) be highlighted in the goals because it has been a focus of attention for everyone, as well as for continuity sake. Mr. Light appreciated the comment.
- In response to a question about aligning the School Improvement Plans with the goals, Mr. Light said that this action item but will be done after the goals are set. While a similar format and alignment with similar goals will be expected, schools will also have personalized goals.
- What goals will be carried forward from the pandemic re curriculum changes? This will be discussed as the year goes on. One example is the move to illustrative math. Nearly all our schools are working on it and if it's working out well, they all will. Our coaches and coordinators developed lessons that teachers across the district now use. This brings a level of consistency we have not had. There are some key areas of learning where consistency is needed – math, literacy, SEL. Because elementary students feed into one Junior High and High School they have to have common elements. Because resources are consistent, some of this is happening organically now.
- Evelyn echoed Yebin's comment regarding measureable goals. She asked for more detail under each goal showing what tactic would be used to achieve it. Tessa explained that for this first draft, Mr. Light was looking for general feedback, and then detail would be added for the next review. It was noted that Amy Krishnamurthy is the "new member mentor" so she can also help answer these kinds of questions.

Charles Kadlec spoke from the public. He asked that the larger community, "beyond school", be included in any surveying and outreach that is done to address stakeholders. He feels that the schools have become less connected to both towns. It would be helpful for the community to understand the schools' problems and vice versa because many people do not have children in the schools. There are opportunities to create new relationships and try new things, including better communication. He urged committee members to think of the community, not just school groups, when looking for feedback.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

- a. **Approval of Meeting Minutes** of 11/19/20 – **VOTE** - *Tessa McKinley*
Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** to approve the minutes of 11/19/20.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang ABSTAINED: Baum)
- b. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**
 - i. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) - *John Petersen*
The HIT met Dec 3rd to review cash flow, the Q1 treasurer's report and the draft audit for last year. For FY20, the audit showed expenses of \$17.5 million, revenues of \$16.5 million for a loss of \$0.93 million. The unrestricted assets (reserve) of the Trust was \$5.9 million. Cash flow reported expenses through October were \$6.3 million against income of

\$5.8 million for a loss of \$534,000. The projected loss for FY21 remains slightly more than one million dollars. COVID claims for members who have tested positive remain low; about 0.6% of total claims. The treasurer's report for Q1 FY21 showed a loss of \$770,000 on income of \$4.4 million and expenses of 5.2 million leaving a reserve balance of \$ 5.2 million. Considerable uncertainty remains about members' health care utilization during FY21 related to reductions in elective procedures and other COVID-related changes in behavior. The Trustees have no information to estimate the impact of COVID vaccination on expenses.

The Trustees are providing guidance to the ABRSD that health care premiums should be expected to rise 5% for FY22. The Trustees will vote the actual rate increase at the meeting of 4 Feb 2021.

- ii. Budget Subcommittee update – Adam Klein
Members met last Monday. While early for solid numbers, good progress is being made on filing for FEMA and other reimbursements. The cost of covid testing for staff was discussed. FY22 budget planning is beginning. Eversource is providing \$100,000 rebate on a \$270,000 purchase of air purifiers for the district, thanks to JD Head and Kate Crosby. Great news.

6. **Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – T McKinley**

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: see motion on memo

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

7. **FYI**

8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Tessa McKinley stated that she would entertain a motion for an executive session to be convened under M.G.L. c.30A, Sec. 21(a) purpose (1): to discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. This is in regard to the Open Meeting Law complaint dated November 13, 2020 received from Martin Benson. She stated that the Committee would not return to open session at the end of the executive session.

At 8:45 p.m., John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** for an executive session to be convened under M.G.L. c.30A, Sec. 21(a) purpose (1): to discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. This is in regard to the Open Meeting Law complaint dated November 13, 2020 received from Martin Benson. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)