

**JOINT
ACTON/ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SC WORKSHOP MINUTES July 2009**

(approved 8/6/09)

Sargent Memorial Library Conference Room
Boxborough

July 1, 2009

SC Attendees: Brigid Bieber, Jonathan Chinitz, Mike Coppolino, Xuan Kong,
Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith McManus, Maria Neyland, John Petersen
Absent: Bruce Sabot
Other Attendees: Stephen Mills, Bart Wendell

Sharon Smith McManus and Xuan Kong called the joint meeting of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee and Acton Public School Committee to order at 6:17pm.

Kopleman and Paige will review changes to the Open Meeting Law at the Acton Memorial Library on Thursday September 24th at 7pm. All SC members are encouraged to attend.

APPROVAL OF WARRANTS

Three AB regional warrants were circulated for SC review and approval:

Warrant 09-026A	\$2,451,199.11 (final payroll)
Warrant 09-027	\$269,174.97
Warrant 10-001	\$1,744,918.07

SUPERINTENDENT INTRODUCTION

Steve Mills recapped the remarks that he made to the school leadership earlier this week. Steve believes in bottom up planning and sees the role of the central office as supporting the primary mission of the schools – classroom teaching. For himself, Steve is committed to universal values - golden rule, respect, fair play and hard work. Steve will personally model good behavior. Steve exemplified his values by stating that he would like the school's contribution to his health care decreased from 85% to 75% to match the contribution rate recently approved by the SC for administrators.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

Bart Wendell began the workshop discussion at 6:40pm. Bart commented that local elected bodies like SC or BOS may be divided along fiscal, social or style issues. He observed that the AB & APS SC tended to be in agreement about fiscal and social issues but was factionalized in terms of style. Some members of the committee are relationship focused while other members of the committee are task focused. The challenge for the committee as a whole is to respect the value of each perspective and act in ways that both preserve our strong, good relationships while effectively completing tasks. The SC agreed that a key ground rule for the workshop and our meetings is to keep the discussion on issues, not on people. Members also need to respect other member's right to an opinion. The SC concluded that 2005 Summer Workshop outcomes are still relevant and should be applied to '09-'10 meetings (Appendix). In addition, the SC agreed that

distribution and/or presentation of appropriate background information should occur before the SC begins decision-making discussions.

Dr Mills agreed that he was responsible for making sure that relevant information is made available to the committee in a timely fashion and commented that we need to ask, “What data is required?” and “What's the right data?” Steve will review all requests and work with staff to estimate the time required. He will want to understand why the information is important and how it will contribute to decision making. Steve asked that SC members appreciate the time required to meet information requests and that noted that staff time is essentially fully committed before allowing time for SC requests.

The committee was in agreement that SC meetings and SC performance could be improved. Specifically, there was agreement that agendas should be prepared and circulated for SC comment a week before each meeting. Supporting materials (memos, presentations) should be provided a week prior to meetings. Steve Mills committed to supporting this schedule and requested that SC members provide feedback on significant concerns *prior to the meeting*. The SC agreed with several members supporting Maria Neyland’s comment that a goal is to make sure that complete information comes to the meeting in a form that supports reaching a conclusion (assuming that action is required) that same evening. Mike Coppolino and others expressed concern about opening and closing issues in a single session in part related to time needed to incorporate public feedback into the decision making. It was agreed that the vice-chair of each committee will make sure the SC follows the ground rules during SC meetings and will remind the committee that a vote may be delayed if the committee has not had enough time to consider the relevant information. Brigid Bieber commented that each topic should be framed so that the action that will be requested of the committee (vote to approve, make recommendation, comment) is clear at the outset of the topic discussion. The SC will include a review of School Committee Performance as an agenda item for its Dec 3rd meeting.

Terry Lindgren stated that it was important to clarify SC decisions by making and voting on understandable motions. The SC as a whole thinks that motions should be written in advance of the meeting and drafts of non-routine motions need to be provided as part of the SC packet delivered prior to the meeting.

Bart polled individual committee members to self-identify specific areas in which they would work on shortening/improving SC meetings:

Jonathan Chinitz	Talk less
John Petersen	Let details go
Terry Lindgren	Keep issues at appropriate high level
Mike Coppolino	Prepare better
Sharon Smith McManus	Don’t repeat
Xuan Kong	Send questions ahead of meeting
Brigid Bieber	Ask what action is being requested from committee
Maria Neyland	Send questions in advance, keep issues at appropriate high level
Steve Mills	Ensure staff is prepared

The SC discussed the role of SC members in supporting SC decisions after non-unanimous votes. The SC unanimously recognizes that the actions of the committee are the actions of the committee as a whole and that individual members cannot and must not present individual positions as those of the committee. Where members hold positions/opinions on major issues that are not likely to be those of the majority, the SC believes that communicating those positions prior to the night of relevant vote will improve SC performance. The SC discussed the role of individual members in communicating/implementing voted actions of the committee. The primary role of individual members is to communicate what action the committee has taken. In longer discussions, individual members may present both the pro and con positions while making clear the committees' chosen course of action. Terry Lindgren noted that in some extreme cases such as a member believes that the SC decision is illegal and/or immoral the SC member must, as an individual, decide if in this specific case she will be unsupportive of the committee's decision.

The SC also recognized the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of executive discussions. The content of executive committee discussions should be reported through approval and public release of executive committee minutes.

OTHER BUSINESS

Maria Neyland stated that the Boxborough SC has formed a subcommittee to study various forms of regionalization/unionization for the Boxborough School System (Blanchard Elementary School). There are many different possibilities that are being investigated by the subcommittee. The Boxborough subcommittee expects to have a good understanding of what is good for Boxborough in Spring 2010. The Boxborough SC requested that the AB regional SC schedule any discussions relative to including Blanchard in the ABRSD after the Boxborough subcommittee completes its study or requests a discussion. The sense of ABRSC is that Boxborough should complete their study before any ABRSC discussions.

Independently, the APSC is exploring the possibility and merits of the Acton Public Schools joining ABRSD. The idea of APS, as a single entity joining ABRSD is totally separate from the Boxborough School System regionalization and will be vetted on its own merits.

Brigid Bieber will communicate the outcome of the SC workshop discussion to Bruce Sabot.

Steve Mills will communicate the outcome of the SC workshop to his leadership team.

SC issues and tasks and member assignments for 2009-2010 will be determined at the August meeting. Xuan Kong will not be in attendance and will send his preferences in advance.

At 9:31 p.m., the joint meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
John Petersen

Appendix

2009 Ground Rule Additions Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

- Keep the discussion on issues, not on people
- Clarify by making motions
- Respect other's right to have an opinion
- Have data before the discussion
- Never vote on the night of the initial presentation (where appropriate)

2005 Summer Workshop Outcomes Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

Put motions on table earlier

Advance preparation of motions

Committee members prepared to speak to all agenda items prior to meeting

Test consensus more often

Chair summarize points of view; members not repeat items that have already been said

Schedule Executive Sessions before School Committee Meetings

Schedule large topics/education reports for separate meetings instead of within a monthly business meeting

In December check in on how we are doing

Send preliminary agendas to committee members at least a week before the meeting

Keep ongoing list of known agenda topics for whole year so that information gathering and preparation can take place earlier.

Keep ongoing list of action items and committee assignments

Make more information available to the public including schedules and agenda items

Individual committee member requests are brought up at meetings and go through the committee

Requests for staff members to do work go through the Committee and/or Chair and then through the Superintendent