

**ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

(approved by AB 5/5/11, by APS 5/19/11)

**Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School**

**March 24, 2011
7:00 p.m. Joint Exec Session
7:30 p.m. APS School Choice Public Hearing
7:40 p.m. Joint SC Meeting
followed by AB SC Meeting
followed by APS SC Meeting**

Members present: Brigid Bieber, Mike Coppolino, Herman Kabakoff, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith McManus (7:05), Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot (7:10)
Members absent: none
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis (7:30), Liza Huber (7:30), Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Joint School Committee was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Brigid Bieber and John Petersen, respective chairs.

JOINT EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 7:04 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining.

YES (Bieber, Coppolino, Kabakoff, Kong, Lindgren, Neyland, Petersen)

This was done after Brigid Bieber declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board. She said the meeting was to discuss contract negotiations with the AEA, OSA, and AFSCME and that the Open Meeting would reconvene at approximately 7:30 p.m..

At 7:04 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton Public School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining.

YES (Coppolino, Kabakoff, Kong, Lindgren, Petersen)

This was done after John Petersen declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board. He said the meeting was to discuss contract negotiations with the AEA, OSA, and AFSCME and that the Open Meeting would reconvene at approximately 7:30 p.m..

At 7:05 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to litigation.

YES (Bieber, Coppolino, Kabakoff, Kong, Lindgren, Neyland, Petersen)

This was done after Brigid Bieber declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board. She said the meeting was to discuss minutes regarding litigation and that the Open Meeting would reconvene at approximately 7:30 p.m.

At 7:05 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton Public School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to litigation.

YES (Coppolino, Kabakoff, Kong, Lindgren, Petersen)

This was done after John Petersen declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board. He said the meeting was to discuss minutes regarding litigation and that the Open Meeting would reconvene at approximately 7:30 p.m.

At 7:35 p.m., the Committees were polled and voted to go out of Executive Session.

The Acton-Boxborough School Committee was suspended and the APS SC meeting continued.

Acton Public School Committee Public Hearing: Participation in School Choice, 2011-2012

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: To approve the administration's recommendation that the Acton Public Schools will not accept any School Choice students in academic year 2011-2012.

At 7:50 p.m. the Acton-Boxborough School Committee reconvened and the Joint School Committee meeting continued.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Brigid Bieber stated that the Committee had just voted to approve executive session minutes and will vote on releasing them at their next meeting.

Brigid presented Sharon Smith McManus with an AB Chair and thanked her for her many years of service on the School Committees, PTSO and countless other committees and activities. Dr. Mills thanked Sharon for all of her invaluable help during his first year. Sharon thanked the Committee saying that the experience had been wonderful and she urged parents to get involved in their children's schools. John Petersen thanked Herman Kabakoff for serving the last nine months of Jonathan Chinitz's term. Herman was presented with a clock and thanked the Committee saying that this is his 18th year of serving on a board in this community, and this year has been a "real education". He thanked everyone who helped him get involved with the schools.

John Petersen reminded everyone to vote in the local election next week.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #11-019 dated 3/10/11 in the amount of \$1,441,664.47 and warrant #11-020 dated 3/24/11 in the amount of \$1,852,312.49 was signed by the ABRSC Chairperson and circulated to the AB Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL of JOINT MINUTES

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

The minutes of 1/6/11 Joint/AB SC meeting, 1/22/11 Joint SC Saturday Budget meeting, 2/3/11 Joint/AB SC meeting with Finance Committees, 2/9/11 Joint SC Executive Session (Open Meeting section), 3/3/11 Joint/AB SC meeting, and 3/11/11 Joint SC meeting were unanimously approved as written.

Acton Public School Committee

The minutes of 1/6/11 Joint/AB SC meeting, 1/22/11 Joint SC Saturday Budget meeting, 2/3/11 Joint/AB SC meeting with Finance Committees, 2/9/11 Joint SC Executive Session (Open Meeting section), 3/3/11 Joint/AB SC meeting, and 3/11/11 Joint SC meeting were unanimously approved as written.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

5.1 Contract Negotiations Update

Brigid Bieber reported that an Agreement was reached with the AEA on 3/11/11. She apologized that the open part of the meeting that night was not able to be taped due to many conflicting activities. Brigid summarized the agreement and said that it was a lengthy process that achieved very important structural change. Don Aicardi ran through the financial impact.

Charlie Kadlec spoke from the audience. He asked if financial analysis had been done on the change from the ERI to the longevity agreement over the 10 years. John Petersen stated that many different types of analyses were done and that the community could be confident that the Subcommittee and School Committee did what they felt they needed to make informed and good decisions.

The executive session minutes for the negotiations will be released as soon as appropriately possible. Legal counsel is being consulted. An executive session is being planned prior to Acton Town Meeting to vote on releasing these minutes.

5.2. ALG Report

John reported that the ALG met on 3/9/11. He reported that on 3/8/11 the APS School Committee met and agreed to support the ALG plan as presented for FY12, but that they did not agree with the ALG number for FY13 and FY14. John and Xuan took back to the ALG that the increase should be 3.5% for FY13 and FY14. The APS School Committee believed that the ALG assumptions for FY12 and FY13 were low. One School Committee member was unhappy about this because the ALG was supposed to be a consensus.

5.3 Acton FinCom Report

Xuan reported on the recent FinCom meetings.

5.4 BLF Report

Maria Neyland reported that the BLF met on Tuesday and was presented information from the Long Range Strategy Planning Committee. BLF provided feedback. BLF is working on their deficit.

5.5 FY' 11 and FY' 12 Budget Update

Dr. Mills reported that the school budgets were supported by the Acton Finance Committee. At the next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting on May 5th, Dr. Mills will bring a proposed list of needs/recommended purchases above the level service budget for discussion and a vote by School Committee. This is based on the very real needs that were identified at Budget Saturday on 1/22/11. He believes there will be approximately \$400,000 of federal money available at the APS level and \$250,000 at the Region.

Don Aicardi said that the Chapter 70 money is not certain yet. The sense is that the numbers will come out late and may trend positively. Based on that trend, the Committee could use a more optimistic Chapter 70 number and move from -5% to -2% of the House 1 budget. This does not change the budget number, but would lower the assessment for Acton and Boxborough.

John Petersen moved:

That the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee adopt a more favorable posture and that the total appropriations for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal

year of July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012 be set at \$38,502,351 and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Agreement and amendments thereto as follows: Acton \$24,725,572, Boxborough \$6,177,519, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,494,689, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$37,267, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$564,346, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$502,300, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

Herman Kabakoff seconded the motion.

Brigid stated that this motion assumes that the ABRSC endorses the ALG recommendation that the Chapter 70 recommendation be changed from -5% to -2%. Because the Regional School Committee had not discussed this yet, the Chair opened the discussion. She also asked, assuming this change is voted and approved, what happens if Chapter 70 aid comes in less. Don Aicardi said either expenditures would be reduced or more aid would be used. The Committee would have to revote on that decision. John Petersen said that to be clear, the School Committee's discussion needs to clearly reflect the Committee's views, not ALG's. There are people making very different assumptions. One member agreed that -2% is a reasonable assumption at this time. Another member disagreed and wants to stay with -5%. The Committee talked about the uncertainty of any financial predictions. Boxborough is still budgeting at -10%, not even -5%. A member advocated for sticking with the previously agreed upon plan and if the numbers come in better, then it can be spent.

Two members stated that ALG appears to be driving the Regional School Committee. It was asked what happens if the motion does not pass and it stays at -5%. Don said that that money would come in and flow to E&D. It was pointed out that four or five years ago, Chapter 70 funding did come in higher in May and it was used to hire more staff to address the 990 requirement. A member voiced concern about the future and the level of reserves. He felt this was a good opportunity to send some money back to the taxpayer. Another member said he would vote for this assessment because it does not change the budget, the same priorities exist in FY12. No one knows what the number will be.

Two Boxborough members were angry that the assessment amount planned to be used at the Acton Town Meeting was not the number that the School Committee voted on. They resented that the assumption could change without Boxborough's representation.

Another member stated that although he was torn about the assumptions, based on Dr. Mills' and others' recommendations, and that reserves are adequate, he supported the motion. Another member agreed with the Boxborough members that changing this number now is risky and it was important for the Regional School Committee to have the opportunity to discuss it. John Petersen referred to some census data that helped to convince him that lowering the assessment was important. One member concluded that he was upset with the attitude that an important budget number like this could be changed without regard to Boxborough, and that all members need to follow the regional agreement together.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee **VOTED** on the motion:

YES: Mike Coppolino, Herman Kabakoff, Xuan Kong, John Petersen

NO: Brigid Bieber, Terry Lindgren, Sharon McManus, Maria Neyland, Bruce Sabot,

Due to the Regional Agreement, Acton members receive two votes each, so the vote was 8 to 7 in favor of revising the assessment. The AB Budget Book for Town Meeting will reflect the new assessment.

5.6 Health Trust Report

John Petersen reported on the March 24th meeting.

5.7 Subcommittee Updates

5.7.1 Policy

5.7.1.1 Recommendation to Approve Revised Policy on Nonresident Tuition Rate (File: JFABA) – **SECOND READING**

Acton –Boxborough Regional School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to approve the revised policy on Nonresident Tuition Rate
(Terry Lindgren was out of the room.)

Acton Public School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: to approve the revised policy on Nonresident Tuition Rate
New or revised policies take effect as soon as they are voted.

5.7.1.2 Recommendation to Approve Revised Policy on Field Trips (File: IJOA) - **SECOND READING**

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the revised Policy on Field Trips (File: IJOA)

Acton Public School Committee

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the revised Policy on Field Trips (File: IJOA)

5.7.1.3 Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan – revised 3/18/11

Liza Huber described how the Plan/Procedures were revised per the DESE request.

An article in the Boston Globe mentioned all school systems that needed to make revisions. One of our changes was to specifically include that the principal is involved in our procedures. The revised Plan is now posted on our School Committee Policies website page.

5.7.2 Class Size – *see Task Force Update*

5.7.3 Long-Range Strategic Planning

Steve Mills reported that the Subcommittee is anxious to get their survey out in the public. Xuan is collecting stakeholder groups to be contacted. Let him know of any groups that should be included. A member asked how long range plans could be made with ALG's ability to change things. This will be included on the Committee's summer workshop agenda.

5.7.4 Cost Savings Task Force – Xuan Kong

Xuan reported that they continue to work on getting this report out by Town Meeting.

5.8 Class Size Task Force Update

Amy Hedison was thanked for submitting a number of good articles in this meeting's packet. This group had been incorrectly called a subcommittee and is now a task force.

NEW BUSINESS

6.1 Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Academic Decathlon Team overnight out of state field trip to National Championship in Charlotte, NC, 4/26/11 – 5/1/11

This approval is not needed due to the revised policy voted at this meeting.

6.2 Acton Town Meeting Plan

Because Brigid Bieber is from Boxborough, John Petersen will do the presentation. Comments should be sent to Brigid regarding the Regional presentation and to John for the APS presentation.

6.3 Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Science Olympiad Team overnight, out of state field trip to National Competition at the University of Wisconsin, 5/19/11 – 5/22/11

This approval is not needed due to the revised policy voted at this meeting.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE

- 7.1 School Committee Meeting Schedule, 2011-2012
Members should let Beth know of conflicts based on the draft meeting schedule.
- 7.2 Superintendent's Evaluation
The public is welcome to submit comments for the Superintendent's evaluation, in addition to the School Committees' input. Citizens may email John Petersen or Brigid Bieber.
- 7.3 Recent Showing of "Raced To Nowhere"
A member asked about the reaction to this 85 minute documentary about kids being unhealthily stressed out, competing against each other and developing disturbing behaviors. Dr. Mills was on the panel with a local pediatrician and ABRHS Counselor Todd Chicko. The inordinate amount of homework issue was a very hot topic. Some emails were sent to the School Committee about homework and Brigid welcomed feedback from the staff on the issue. Overriding courses and lack of sleep were also of concern. Dr. Mills said that he would not endorse a no homework policy because he respects how the schools make decisions collaboratively. Ten minutes per grade is the general homework rule in our schools. We must provide a world class education for those children that can do that. If they cannot do it, it is fine to step down a bit and still feel very good about that. An example from the parent of a child in Junior High was given where extraordinary homework was assigned to be done over February vacation. Dr. Mills disagreed with that. He stressed that a healthy balance is needed. A member asked why the School Committee was not asking for more counselors to help deal with this. Dr. Mills said that he would take responsibility for that and he agrees that we need more counselors and that the NEASC agreed. ABRHS Senior Michael Perry spoke from the audience. He said that now that he has gone through senior year, he sees how important it is to have access to your counselor. He said that appointments need to be made far in advance, and sometimes it was just not possible to get to see a counselor when you needed to. Mike was thanked for his valuable insight.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- 8.1 ABRHS
A Gift from Mr. and Mrs. Donald Meschisen to the Class of 2013 was recognized.
- 8.2 RJ Grey Junior High
Project Wellness was held on March 23rd. Dr. Mills attended and spoke very highly of the event.
- 8.6 Discussion of Special Education Parent Advisory Council's (PAC) Analysis of MCAS **and Response to 2010 MCAS Analysis**, AB Sped PAC Co-Chairs
Dr. Mills highlighted this report and thanked the Sped PAC and Liza Huber for addressing this issue. Bill Guthlein, author of the SpedPAC Report, spoke from the audience. He said that Dr. Mills made a comment that he has a laser like focus on educating kids and that we must use data to measure and assess progress. MCAS is one set of data that can be used. Bill encouraged the staff to use the Student Growth Model data as one more useful tool for educating children. He asked the Committee, "Do we educate our highest achievers, as well as our middle and lower achieving students? Are they all moving forward at the same level?" Bill said that these are questions that have to be addressed, and he hopes that this metric will become part of the ongoing discussion. John Petersen thanked Bill for a spectacular job of analyzing the data, but he also cautioned the use of data because it can be very difficult to know if data will have the desired effect. It is complicated to be responsive to data. There are restrictions. Another member asked Bill for questions that the data would answer in this report, he was not interested in solutions, but the questions that the data might answer.
- 8.7 Correspondence from the Community – the public was thanked for their valuable comments.
- 8.11 FY'10 ABRSD Auditor's Reports, Borgatti Harrison & Co.
Herman Kabakoff highlighted the "special initiatives" section of one of these reports saying that it put our schools in a very positive perspective for him. Brigid agreed, saying that we do have a district to be very proud of and many volunteers that commit so much and a community that expects a lot from the School Committee. It is a balancing act with taxpayers.

Xuan asked Don Aicardi for an update on our computer software and what his plans are for moving forward on the financial software. Don will respond at a future meeting.

Brigid offered another FYI, stating that Boxborough has been talking about their declining enrollment and how to deal with it. There will be forums soon to talk about: potential unionization (job sharing), regionalization with Acton, and opportunities to tuition students into the district. The public is welcome.

APS School Committee is suspended - AB SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING continued.

9.1 ABRSD Excess and Deficiency (E & D) Certification from MA DOR

Don Aicardi said that they have been answering questions from the DOR up thru this morning. They hope the E and D is wrapped up this week.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee adjourned at 9:53 p.m.

The ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE reconvened.

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Warrant #201119 dated 3/22/11 in the amount of \$213,541.33 was signed by the APS Chairperson and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of March 17, 2011 were unanimously approved as written. Terry Lindgren abstained because he did not attend the meeting.

KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT UPDATE

Dr. Mills began the discussion by stating that he made a mistake at the last APS School Committee meeting on 3/17/11. He thought that there was consensus that registration of 300 students was the agreed on number that determined 15 vs 16 Kindergarten sections. He understands now that last week was not the time to make that important decision. He should have considered the "Acton way" and let people process the information and weigh in prior to a decision. He respects this process.

261 children were registered for Kindergarten for 2011-2012, 6 are staff members, plus 15 extra that are expected to arrive before September, bringing the total to 282 children. This would represent 15 sections with 15-18 children in each. This would represent by far the smallest Kindergarten class over the past 20 years. Space for classrooms is another constraint when considering additional sections. It is also easier for parents to get their first choice with 15 vs 16 sections. This is a resource allocation issue. Moving from 16 to 15 sections frees up \$70,000 of recurring money because it lives on in the budget. He continues to recommend 15 sections and to hire permanently a math curriculum specialist with the savings. Many children will benefit from this specialist who will work under Deb Bookis and with the principals.

Marie Altieri presented the current data. Today we have 267 students registered. This is the smallest number in a very long time. We now plan on 282. With 15 sections that would be 18.8 students per K class. She is confident in the 282 number based on the past. We have not had 16 Kindergarten sections every year.

Marie and Dr. Mills met with the principals and Deb Bookis twice this week and they agreed on funding 15 Kindergarten sections and reallocating the \$70,000 to a certified math specialist/coach. Damien Sugrue, Principal at Conant School, spoke for all of the Principals and said that after thoroughly discussing the issues, they all agreed that 15 sections is appropriate and that they support the new math specialist based on all of their prioritized needs lists.

The Committee discussed how the new math curriculum position would be structured. While the job description has not been written yet, this new staff member will be valuable to assist with the new common core standards and particularly algebra in the 6th grade. Because the current staff is not totally familiar with all the current math publishers, the new specialist will help choosing new texts. Some curriculum coordination between 6th grade and junior high will also be very valuable. A math curriculum specialist is also needed to work with the special educators. Deb Bookis said that the coaching model is very popular because it is ongoing professional development and more immediate assistance to the students.

Dr. Mills, Marie Altieri and the Principals were thanked for their hard work on this issue this week.

Terry Lindgren wants to address class size guidelines and make kindergarten 20 students. He proposed that the Committee reduce the Kindergarten numbers down to 20 students per class. The motion was not seconded. Another member stated that this was not something to vote on but to reflect.

Another member asked how the Committee will know if this is having any positive effect in our elementary schools. Deb said that she will be able to see it when she is talking to teachers. The teachers need the time and training to do these assessments. The new standards will be hard for teachers to fully address. Steve Mills said that some of the struggles in the Junior High math classes developed in the elementary schools math instruction. This is a good question for consideration. One member suggested that a good answer to how to measure success could come from the candidate. He thanked the parents who wrote and came to the meetings.

Herman Kabakoff moved that we establish 15 sections for the incoming kindergarteners this year. The motion was seconded. Sharon McManus made a friendly amendment that the Committee reallocate \$70,000 that is not being used to support a math specialist. Herman accepted the amendment.

John Petersen said that the School Committee has general budgetary responsibility, but once funding is allocated, the School Committees only give advice to the Superintendent. He offered a friendly amendment that the School Committee enthusiastically endorse the Superintendent's plan. The amendment was accepted. If agreeable to Dr. Mills and the staff, the APS SC is excited about 15 Kindergarten sections and that one hole is filled in the APS system.

It was pointed out that there are other needs in the system and it is the obligation of the School Committee to discuss and try to fill these needs. This includes the issue of instructional assistants and when we have the discussion in the spring about extra money, Dr. Mills will present a proposal to fund them.

John Petersen said that there is no plan right now to cap the PTSO donations. Mike Coppolino clarified that the point he was trying to make at the last meeting was that most districts do not pay for personnel out of PTO funds. He said that at some point, the Committee has to put a stake in the ground. The PTOS are clearly stressed trying to raise such a large amount of money every year. Xuan wants to discuss funding of the assistants in May.

NEXT MEETINGS

April 4, 6:00 pm, possible AB and APS SC Meeting, ABRHS rooms 102/104 E

May 5, 7:30 pm, AB SC Meeting, JH Library

May 19, 7:30 pm APS SC Meeting at CONANT School

The APS School Committee adjourned at 11:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda attached.

Materials for this meeting are posted on the schools' website at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>.