

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes (approved 2/16/12)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High

January 19, 2012
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, John Petersen
Members Absent: Kim McOsker
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Michael Coppolino, Chair.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201214 dated 1/10/12 in the amount of \$109,461.86 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of 12/15/11 were approved as amended.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT - Balanced Assessments

Deborah Bookis, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Priscilla Kotyk and Matt McDowell, APS Assistant Principals, Eileen Sullivan, APS Elementary Curriculum Specialist, Jean Oviatt-Rothman, APS Mathematics Curriculum Specialist and Coach, Noel Erickson, Reading Specialist, Douglas School

Dr. Mills began by saying that good teaching includes frequent assessment, as noted in the Long Range Strategic Plan value, “Educational policy and resource decisions informed by research and **evidence**”. There are a number of ways to assess students, MCAS testing being only one of them. Deborah Bookis thanked the teachers and students whose work was incorporated into the presentation. Eileen Sullivan talked about how hands on work goes hand in hand with paper and pencil tests. Teachers collect a wealth of evidence on the students. All assessments have advantages and challenges. Specifics were discussed about science, social studies, math concepts, reading skills and additional literacy and writing assessments. Amy Bisiewicz and Deb are looking at digital platforms to be used to collect student work and assessment. See slides.

Mike Coppolino thanked Deb and the staff for an excellent presentation.

A Committee member asked how assessments have changed. Rubrics and portfolios have been used for many years. Assessing math concepts is about 4 years old. The online pilot is new this year. Benchmark reading assessments are two years old now in our schools. Leveled libraries in the schools are new this year, and have been very valuable. Expanding our staff has allowed us to pull students out to assess them, for instance using our math assistants. The Assistant Principals have been a real benefit, allowing the principals to get into classrooms more often.

John Petersen asked how the budget next year would affect this area. Three personnel positions are in the investment budget – a full time person for art, physical education and music in each of the elementary schools. This will have a synergistic effect in each school, helping greatly with the scheduling of students’ and staff time. This will allow for more opportunities for art, PE and music to be incorporated into students’ classes, and will affect the kinds of interventions that can be done in the schools. Specialists’ time is complicated now because they are not there full time. This investment will create increased

cooperative opportunities. The increase in classroom assistants' time in the investment budget is valuable because assistants can monitor a class while the teacher does an assessment.

Dr. Mills said that notable success was achieved in the Junior High this year because a team worked to assess the nature of students' weaknesses of their math MCAS scores. Some had trouble with reading but not the math, for some the weakness was the math concepts, for some students it was behavioral. Teachers addressed the three groups and the scores improved significantly. It's about constantly gathering data and making informed decisions about how to improve instruction.

Xuan Kong suggested that these slides be used for the Back to School Nights for parents. Deb agreed to post them on the website. She said that it is important to write educational goals without teacher jargon because parents need to understand what they are doing. There is material that teachers need to cover and yet, there can be 25 different questions of curiosity that can take children in many different directions. This is an ongoing struggle for teachers. Teachers can help make the connections for kids between what they have to learn and what they are captivated by. Priscilla Kotyk pointed out that formative assessment is an ongoing process to check in on kids. A child would not fail a final test because the teacher would have known what he was doing, if formative assessment was taking place.

Mike Coppolino asked for this presentation to supplement the MCAS presentation done last fall. He stated that parent Bill Guthlein did some valuable analysis of the MCAS student growth percentile (SGP) model and feels it is important for parents to understand the trends over time so they have a sense of what's working and what's not. Mike feels that the SGP levels the playing field. He advocated for looking at SGP results over a period of years between schools in our district as well as and comparing them to other districts. He asked that the information be made available to the public to help them make informed decisions.

APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group

Marie Altieri reported that work continues on this informal working group established under 150 E standard negotiations. Minutes are posted on the town website.

7.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report

John Petersen reported on the 12/22/11 meeting at the joint School Committee meeting on 1/5/12. Next meeting will be 1/26/12.

7.3 FY'13 Budget

7.3.1 ALG Report

Xuan reported that ALG met on 1/12/12. John Petersen participated remotely. Main topics were the FY13 plan for revenue assumption, appropriate funding level for OPEB and how much reserves to use. It was noted that school budget hasn't gone through Budget Saturday's review, Discussion on OPEB is converging as a whole at \$500,000 level. At the meeting, it was reiterated that APS School Committee's position on reserve use would be \$2m in addition to \$.5 m to OPEB. The Acton Board of Selectmen does not have a formal position yet. Fincom suggested to use \$1m to support the operating budget and \$.5m for OPEB. Consensus does not exist on this point.

The Strawman/contingency plan was proposed at ALG by Don Aicardi, Steve Mills, John Murray and Steve Ledoux. The goal of the plan is "to create a format for the Committee to discuss and reach consensus on the over arching issues of operating budgets, use of reserves and OPEB. The Town is requesting \$600,000 for Nursing and \$250,000 for transportation. If Town Meeting does not support these, there will be less reserve use. Xuan agreed to take the Strawman Plan back to the School Committee for feedback.

Mike Coppolino is comfortable with the budget put forth and previous discussion. He agrees that something has to be done about OPEB and he defers the numbers to Don and Steve. He feels the FinCom's Long Range Plan is an excellent model and a target to shoot for.

John Petersen felt that while the structure of FinCom's model is very helpful, the assumptions are too conservative, specifically 8 – 10% health care inflation is in the past. Similarly, there is some complexity but teachers salary compensation raises are no longer at 5% but more like in the 2% range. He feels the model is overly pessimistic in that regard.

Xuan asked if it was the sense of the Committee to endorse or adopt the FinCom model for future budget development.

John Petersen stated that if the APS School Committee wants to use this model, it has to be endorsed by the Budget Director as well. Don Aicardi said he eagerly looks forward to trying it out. He will review the model and let the Committee know what he thinks. He noted that ALG spends a lot of time on the year to year, and should also focus more long term, on FY14 and 15. Having FinCom's model as an alternative to do this will be valuable. Don said that this is a perfect task for the new proposed budget analyst to take on. Current Finance office staffing makes it difficult to add new projects. John Petersen pointed out that there is a difference between volunteer work and staff work. While Acton is very fortunate to have many outstanding, committed volunteers, sustainability can be an issue. Certain tasks should be done by staff. The next ALG meeting is January 30.

7.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report

Xuan reported on the 1/10/12 meeting. FinCom's Point of View document came out earlier and he encouraged everyone to review it. Current focus is on the Town's nursing and transportation issues. Fincom felt that they have not heard much about schools' budget yet.

7.3.3 FY13 Budget Discussion

Dr. Mills said there is a disconnect between the Town and School budgets that must be worked out. He is committed to weaning off the use of reserves and is very aware that replenishing reserves is pro-school. He understands the reticence to put forward the investment budget above level service, but will advocate for it after scrubbing each expense and cutting if possible. The School Committee has been comfortable with \$2m but now since ALG, the plan is \$2m and \$.5 for OPEB, more than the Finance Committee is willing to use. The Saturday Budget Meeting (1/28/12) will be the place to ask any and all questions.

The Other Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) obligation is new, and a liability that future School Committees will be dealing with. It will be costly and take a lot of cooperation from everyone to work. Putting \$500,000 aside for OPEB increases reserve use, on paper, to \$2.6 m to balance the budget. Steve and Don will present to Acton Fin Com next Tuesday night.

Slide 33 shows annual budget increases for the past 3 years (.61%, .78%, 4.41%) This is a result of ARRA funding and paying items forward. It was understood that once the federal money was gone and expenses were paid from the operating budget, the numbers would increase. After applying EdJobs funding for the last time, the 4.41% will be reduced to 3.04% for FY13.

Dr. Mills talked about the Investment Budget requests including: Classroom Assistant funding of \$108,000, .4 FTE ELE teacher, 1.0 FTE SPED Teacher, 1.0 FTE Music Specialist, 1.0 FTE Physical Education Specialist, .6 FTE Art Specialist, .5 FTE Budget Analyst and health insurance for 6 potential new positions. A prioritized list of APS Personnel needs not yet included in the FY13 proposed budget was also shared.

Dr. Mills is very grateful for the level service budgets supported by the School Committees so far, saying, "Our districts have been treading water instead of drowning as so many communities have done". That said, he emphasized that treading water has a cost. The Long Range Strategic Plan and the NEASC Report highlight this issue. Dr. Mills concluded by asking for the Committee's support of the FY13 investment budget.

John Petersen spoke with the Boxborough members of the Regional School Committee because the Committees have struggled with how ALG discussions relate to regional issues. Boxborough members understand this and agreed that the APS School Committee could have this discussion and then repeat it at the Regional SC meeting on February 2. John thanked Steve and Don for making a remarkable presentation based on historical events, and for their comments about understanding the schools as part of the total entity.

Dennis Bruce asked about savings that could come from the Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group and if that could be designated for OPEB funding. Marie said it was possible and more would be known in a few weeks. John questioned whether the APS SC should vote on OPEB or not because a vote of the Acton Board of Selectmen would establish OPEB for APS District. The sense of the Committee was that OPEB is a liability and a communal budgetary commitment. The APS School Committee decided it needed to take no action. The Regional School Committee will discuss OPEB on 2/2/12.

Current OPEB obligations are being paid each year for our current retirees' health insurance. John pointed out that the issue is that all the projections show that the liabilities will grow as a percentage of the budget. If so, a plan is needed to supplement what we are currently paying.

Xuan questioned the sustainability of the budget going forward. He said that the FinCom presented a good framework to use going forward. This model would let groups speak the same language about future requirements of the revenue support. That is the first step. If calculations show that the numbers do not support it, then costs must be cut or efficiencies found. If that is not possible, the public should be told that leadership feels the expenses are necessary and revenue must be found elsewhere. Xuan believes the proposed FY13 APS Budget can be afforded this year, but does not know about sustaining it after that.

Dr. Mills said that Doug Tindal was focused on sustainability when they spoke this morning. John would never support a budget that he didn't believe was sustainable, but it is not something that can be easily calculated. He would rather use less reserves, but understands why it is being done now. He stressed that the people who have studied the numbers, feel this is best, at this time.

Maureen Flynn spoke from the public saying that OPEB is a responsibility and part of the big picture. She asked if the Town was considering why small houses are being torn down and replaced with big houses with lots of kids. Mike pointed out that ongoing dialogue happens at ALG and specifically the relationship between new apartments and increased student enrollment has been considered. The impact is less than what was thought based on the Ashtons' enrollment projections. Representatives from other Boards and Committees attend School Committee meetings and SC sends reps to observe meetings as well. John said that people on the Boards are painfully aware that all of these decisions reverberate throughout the town and that a balance has to be found. Acton 2020 is another example of groups working together.

Xuan asked the Committee to confirm their support of the Strawman proposal so he could bring it back to ALG. Hearing no objections, Mike stated that he would take that as agreement and the Committee was comfortable with that.

7.4 2012-2013 Kindergarten Orientation Night, 1/10/12

Marie Altieri reported on Kindergarten Night. Early registration for siblings and walkers was last week. School tours have started. Registration for the public will be in mid March. 120 children were registered this week (280 projected).

7.5 APS Student Enrollment/Classroom Planning Report

Marie Altieri reported on Classroom and Class Size Projections and their budgetary impact. Enrollment has dropped 60 students last year and 60 students the year before. That could mean a drop of 400 kids in a 10 year period. This affects Chapter 70 aid funding and could add up to \$1million.

Gates School has the greatest space needs now so they would get the first available room. Because it would be due to elimination of a half day kindergarten, it would not happen until the next year when 1 ½ rooms would freed up. As that grade level moves up, more space would be available. The next year the decision of where to open up the next classroom would be based on need, not necessarily at the same school. While open enrollment is considered, there are many other space needs factors so open enrollment would not be top priority. Siblings seem to come in waves and are unpredictable.

Lynne Newman, principal of Gates School, is trying to be creative about finding space but does not want to move kids or staff out of the building. Xuan asked if we can have two kindergarten sections could be at Gates for school year 2013 and shift one Gates kindergarten section (to maintain 15 kindergarten sections for SY2013) to one of the schools at the Parker Damon Building. An issue would be that this one class would be two sections at Gates and four at PDB. It was asked if creating space at Gates is a higher priority than to maintain three sections at the other schools. Lynne will consider all options, including when half of a classroom is available if an extended day program could be added.

John thanked Marie for an excellent discussion that showed the long term complexity of space and class sizes. Marie reminded the Committee that six modulars are also still in use.

Dennis Bruce asked if the balance of lowering the average class size was being considered. Marie replied that it was and that the policy subcommittee is going to review the class size policies. She also noted that the numbers are projections, not cast in stone.

John Manning spoke from the audience, sharing his concerns about the ability of smaller grades to progress through the school. Marie said that the smaller groups can still become a wonderful community, as has been done at Merriam in the past. Mr Manning was surprised that the projections are to reduce classes and not to reduce class size as well. He asked how the projected class sizes compare to other communities. He urged the Committee to have an open discussion of investing in more space for smaller class sizes. He emphasized that this space issue has an impact on all aspects of the schools and advocated for the Committee to consider investing in more modulars. Mike suggested that Mr. Manning speak directly with Marie about his concerns.

7.6 Discussion of Potential Acton Public School Students Tuitioning to Blanchard School

Marie Altieri reported that only 4 people have expressed interest. New families are the most likely to be interested. Marie suggested that we may want to inform these families about Boxborough's Choice program. Mike asked how the public was being informed about this possibility, emphasizing that every student that leaves our district is a loss of \$5000. John felt the effort was adequate and if 3 or 4 families go through the process, the Committee could see how it works out.

7.7 New Ruling by AG: Remote Participation at Open Meetings

The Acton Board of Selectmen approved remote participation at their meeting on 1/9/12, making it an option for APS School Committee meetings as well. Google Hangouts was tried successfully as a demo at the last AB SC meeting. Mike asked John about the audio-only ALG experience. While John agreed it is much better to be in the room for a meeting, having a variety of people on committees, even if they have

to call in occasionally, is valuable. Members were reminded that the Chair must be notified ahead of time if remote participation is needed.

7.8 Recommendation to Accept Grant from IBM to Merriam

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to accept this generous gift of \$1000, given in recognition of an IBM employee who volunteered in the Merriam school for at least 40 hours last year.

7.9 Recommendation to Accept Grant from IBM to McCarthy-Towne

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to accept this generous gift of \$1000, given in recognition of an IBM employee who volunteered in the McCarthy-Towne school for at least 40 hours last year.

7.10 Purposes and Timing of Addenda

Mike Coppolino asked why so much material is being included in the addenda. He emphasized the need for important items to be included in the packet that is posted on the Friday night prior to each meeting.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

8.1 Pupil Services

8.1.3 New SpEd PAC Parent Handbook found at <http://www.abspedpac.org/> Dr. Mills thanked Nancy Sherburne and the SpEd PAC for a wonderful document for our families.

8.4 FY'11 APS Food Services Report

Xuan noted that lunch prices were increased for FY12 and he would assume a surplus would be created. He asked for a projection for FY12.

8.7 Acton Town Election – March 27, 2012

Mike highlighted that the last day for candidates to file papers with the Acton Town Clerk is February 6th. There is one uncontested seat because John Petersen is not running. Mike encouraged “any and all people who are interested” to consider getting involved.

NEXT MEETINGS

January 28, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm Joint SC Budget Saturday, RJGJHS Library

February 2, 7:30 pm ABRSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library (*AB Open Budget Hearing*)

February 16, 7:00 pm APSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library (*APS Open Budget Hearing*)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda attached

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High

January 19, 2012
7:30 p.m.

AGENDA with addendum

- 1.0 CALL TO ORDER
- 2.0 CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION
- 3.0 STATEMENT OF WARRANT
- 4.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - 4.1 APS SC December 15, 2011 (*addendum*)
- 5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- 6.0 EDUCATION REPORT (7:35)

Balanced Assessments - *Deborah Bookis, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Priscilla Kotyk and Matt McDowell, APS Assistant Principals, Eileen Sullivan, APS Elementary Curriculum Specialist, Jean Oviatt-Rothman, APS Mathematics Curriculum Specialist and Coach, Noel Erickson, Reading Specialist, Douglas School (addendum)*

 - 6.1 Presentation slides
 - 6.2 Supporting materials
 - 6.3 APS MCAS 2011 by school
- 7.0 APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS (8:30)
 - 7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group– *Marie Altieri (oral) (8:30)*
 - 7.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report – *John Petersen (8:35)*
 - 7.2.1 FYI – update from 1/5/12
 - 7.3 FY'13 Budget – *Steve Mills, Don Aicardi (8:40)*
 - 7.3.1 ALG Report – *Xuan Kong*
 - 7.3.1.1 Meeting materials, 1/12/12
 - 7.3.1.2 Discussion re: OPEB and Use of Free Cash
 - 7.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report – *Xuan Kong*
 - 7.3.2.1 FinCom Point of View, 12/8/11
 - 7.3.2.2 Report on 1/10/12 meeting (*oral*)
 - 7.3.3 Preliminary Schedule for Saturday, January 28 JT SC Budget Meeting
 - 7.3.4 Presentation slides (*addendum*)
 - 7.4 2012-2013 Kindergarten Orientation, 1/10/12, *Marie Altieri (oral) (9:30)*
 - 7.5 APS Student Enrollment/Classroom Planning Report, *Marie Altieri (addendum) (9:35)*
 - 7.6 Discussion of Potential Acton Public School Students Tuitioning to Blanchard School, *Marie Altieri (addendum) (9:45)*
 - 7.7 New Ruling by AG: Remote Participation at Open Meetings – *Mike Coppolino (oral) (9:50)*
 - 7.7.1 Acton Board of Selectmen approved 1/9/12
 - 7.8 Recommendation to Accept Grant from IBM to Merriam – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 7.9 Recommendation to Accept Grant from IBM to McCarthy-Towne – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills*
 - 7.10 Purposes and Timing of Addenda – *Mike Coppolino (oral)*

8.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION (10:00)

8.1 Pupil Services

8.1.1 ELL Student Enrollment Report – January 1

8.1.2 OnTeam, Dec 2011/Jan 2012

8.1.3 New SpEd PAC Parent Handbook found at <http://www.abspedpac.org/>

8.2 FY'12 Monthly APS Financial Reports

8.3 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info – January 1

8.4 FY'11 APS Food Services Report

8.5 Correspondence from the Community

8.6 School Newsletters

Conant Crier: <http://conant.ab.mec.edu/pto/newsletter.html>

Douglas Digest: <http://douglas.ab.mec.edu/pto/digest.html>

Gates Gazette: <http://gatesschoolpto.org/gazette>

McCarthy-Towne Bulletin: <http://www.mctptso.org/bulletin/>

Merriam Comm News: <http://www.merriampto.org/Merriam>

Acton Public School Preschool: <http://ab.mec.edu/Preschool/index.htm>

8.7 Acton Town Election – March 27, 2012

Last Day for Candidates to File Papers with Town Clerk – February 6th

9.0 NEXT MEETINGS

January 28, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm Joint SC Budget Saturday, RJGJHS Library

February 2, 7:30 pm ABRSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library (*AB Open Budget Hearing*)

February 16, 7:00 pm APSC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library (*APS Open Budget Hearing*)

ADJOURNMENT (10:05)