

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Minutes** (approved 5/17/12)

**Cafetorium**  
**Gates School**

**March 15, 2012**  
**7:00 p.m.**

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*Members Present:* Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, John Petersen, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy  
*Members Absent:* none  
*Others:* Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

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The Acton Public School Committee was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson, Mike Coppolino.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201218 dated 3/6/12 in the amount of \$179,554.21 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Feb 16, 2012 APS SC meeting were approved as amended.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT – *Lynne Newman, Principal, Gates School*

Mrs. Newman presented on the Gates School Improvement Plan Goal #1: Language Arts – Reading Comprehension. This is the first year that data has been collected for grades 1-6. She gave examples of leveled books and professional learning resources. Next steps include: sharing data with staff and reading specialist, spring data collection, shifting to electronic data to improve accessibility, matching literacy resources with instructional needs, and providing professional learning opportunities as needed. The point was made that if a child cannot read, he/she cannot access all of the curriculum material. Classrooms are created with a mix of reading levels, not homogeneous.

Deborah Bookis reported that they have started looking at digital platforms. There is a concern about backing up the documentation and security. Web based software would automatically coordinate the data making it easily accessible for staff. Mrs. Bookis and Amy Bisiewicz are evaluating what other districts are using to determine what is the best tool for APS/ABRSD. When Mrs. Newman arrived at Gates 4 years ago, there were no reading assessments being done. She identified this as a need and worked hard to get teachers to appreciate the data, as she does. Mrs. Bookis pointed out that fluency, accuracy, and comprehension are the three key pieces of this type of assessment. Conversion charts to compare the various assessments are very valuable.

Dr. Mills emphasized that this shows how the District is in the beginning stages of using data to inform the teaching of our children. Similar to the use of actual data for the new teacher evaluations, we are moving in the right direction. The Long Range Strategic Plan supports this focus.

APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group

Marie Altieri reported that the final document has now been signed by all 8 bargaining units and it has gone to the Acton Board of Selectmen.

7.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report

John Petersen reported that the HIT met twice to set rates. See report in the 3/1/12 Joint School Committee meeting packet. Rates dropped 7% so rates this year are down 3% per John.

### 7.3 FY'13 Budget

#### 7.3.1 ALG Report

Xuan Kong reported that ALG met on 3/8/12 to look at FY13, FY14 and FY15. The two main issues were Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) and sustainability of the budgets. There is disagreement on whether the amounts being put into OPEB are too much or too little and it is very complicated. The discussion of budget capacity vs need will be an active and long term discussion. The Finance Committee understands that FY13 is the current focus, but after Town Meeting everyone is being urged to look at FY14 and FY15 and how FinCom's long term model could be applied.

#### 7.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report

Don Aicardi presented at the meeting on 3/6/12 and the FinCom voted to recommend the APS FY13 budget and AB FY13 assessment. Dr. Mills met with Steve Ledoux. The Board of Selectmen also voted to support the APS Budget and AB Assessment.

#### 7.3.3 Classroom Assistants / Before/After School Program Review

Dr. Mills thanked all involved in this extensive review of our programs over the past few months. He summarized that there are 5 separate and very different, very popular, programs in our schools. Some PTOs feel a lot of pressure to raise money for the assistants. Some significant financial changes have been made, as outlined in 7.3.3.1 in the packet. These programs are not supposed to generate profit. The changes add more transparency. Dr. Mills very much appreciated the letter signed by all PTO co-chairs in support of his recommendations. John Petersen thanked Mike Coppolino for staying on top of this issue, resulting in more clarity about how they are run.

### 7.4 FY'12 Budget, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Report

Don Aicardi reported that the FY12 APS budget did not use any outside grant funds (such as ARRA, SFSF or Ed Jobs) to underwrite it. \$128,000 of special education tuition was prepaid for FY12 from the FY11 budget. Utility savings were anticipated by re-allocating \$92,000 towards the hiring of \$108,000 in classroom assistants last June. Due to the mild winter, a \$41,000 surplus is projected by the close of FY12. The circuit breaker reimbursement rate was estimated to be 40% but ended up being 65% (September 2011). The finalization of the bus contract last spring, after the FY12 budget was finalized, resulted in a \$23,000 projected surplus in this account by close of FY12. The 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter report in May will include any year end spending proposals. Don stated that he is comfortable with the current FY13 budget numbers.

With respect to special education costs and how they change over time, John Petersen expressed concern over the understanding of the District's APS special education students' numbers and what they mean. Although the issue is very complicated due to the many moving parts, he emphasized that this is essential to understand so that the leadership knows the funds are being well managed. Mike Coppolino agreed that a clear picture of how things are increasing is needed as well as how money is being used to backfill.

### 7.5 Policy Update

7.5.1 Assignment of Elementary Students from Other Schools File: JCAC – **SECOND READING**  
This discussion and vote was postponed to the next APS SC meeting on May 17<sup>th</sup> so the policy subcommittee could make additional revisions.

### 7.6 Kindergarten Registration Update

Marie Altieri reported that 252 students are currently signed up for kindergarten in the Fall based on yesterday's registration for the public. In the last two School Committee meetings, the Committee discussed the possibility of sending some children to Boxborough, but now with the number of students registered, she asked members to consider reducing the number of sections from 15 to 14 sections for September. Given projected Kindergarten enrollment of 270 students in September, 15 sections would translate to 18.0 students per class, and 14 sections would translate to 19.3 students per class.

The Gates School has a significant shortage of classroom space. If Gates had 2 kindergarten sections next year, instead of 3, this would provide a room for art the next year, which is one year sooner than expected. A \$58,000 cost savings results if a Kindergarten section is cut. Instead of reducing the budget by this amount, Dr. Mills would like to “take this credit” for next year instead. A decision about the number of sections is needed before the lottery in mid April. Dr. Mills urged the Committee to take the time to think carefully about this question.

Mike Coppolino stated that the Finance Committee felt this year that the School Committee had a solid budget but for FY14 there were some serious financial concerns. Putting the savings from this decision aside was important to him. Dr. Mills was asked what class size range he is comfortable with for kindergarten. Dr. Mills replied that between 20 and 21 students for grades K, 1 and 2 is adequate staffing.

Marie has spoken with all of the elementary principals and they support having 14 kindergarten sections based on the current enrollment projections.

John Petersen asked for a sense of the Committee. Xuan Kong said that he is comfortable looking at reducing a Kindergarten class, knowing it could be added in later grades. He wants to be sure that parents have a chance to comment and react.

John suggested that the Committee could say that if registration stays at the projected number, they could instruct the Administration to reduce a section. If enrollment changes, then the decision could be reopened. Mike disagreed, not wanting to make the decision too quickly. He advocated for deciding at the 3/22/12 meeting.

When asked about future sections being eliminated and if they would be at Gates, Marie said that they do expect to need 14 kindergarten sections for a long time. The Administration wants to give Gates an art room and a music room, and then move to another school to add space. She noted that this could mean moving teachers and it would have to be done carefully.

Carol Leandro spoke from the public, saying that for years an ongoing issue that PTO chairs raise regularly is that our class sizes are much higher than in other communities. She asked, “Are we giving away a chance to address this?” Marie said that she is confident that with 14 sections we will have reasonable and competitive class sizes. Dennis Bruce pointed out that the PTOs raise a lot of money for assistants to work with the kids and help to reduce the adult to student ratio. He advocated for not voting without a healthy discussion at the next meeting.

John Petersen stated that the Committee could provide advice to the Administration without voting. He said that Carol’s point is the crux of the management issue. The Committee could maintain pupil spending or continue to spend at same level and have class sizes go down, or issues other than class size could be addressed to provide a better educational experience, or a combination.

Paul Murphy asked if there was an optimum based on resources available and effectiveness. Dr. Mills said that 15:1 is the optimum ratio. Blanchard School has some classes of this ratio, but they have sustainability issues. John remarked that objective evidence is valuable, but hard to come by. He noted that the Junior High leadership states that there is no noticeable difference when the students all come together in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Xuan asked that the Committee change the way they look at things. Instead of considering how much money is spent, the amount of service provided to our students should be key. When the Class size study committee presented, their recommendation was to improve student and adult interaction, not to lower class size. He suggested that using our Long Range Strategic Plan as a guide, the Committee needs to be very serious about the evidence that says we have to address class size to improve educational experience.

Mike stated that as a teacher, there is no difference between going from 20 students to 19 in a class. He agreed that our ratios are not optimal, but feels they are the best we can do with the resources available. He urged the public to look beyond just this year. The Committee has made a significant commitment to assistants and that is a different dynamic than other towns, but one that works for us.

Maureen Flynn spoke from the public. As a school choice town, she stated that people have selected their school because they have children that will go to that community as it was presented to them. Reducing a section means a child will have approximately 40 peers instead of 60 peers. She asked the Committee to consider not just what is on paper. She does not want to see her school (Gates) affected like this, even if it means they get an art and a music room. She asked that if the decision is made to have only 2 sections at Gates, that it be communicated to the public thoughtfully.

#### 7.7 Acton Students attending Blanchard

Marie Altieri reported that only 3 students expressed interest in this – 1 kindergarten, 1 third grader and 1 sixth grader. The Administration will not move forward. Boxborough will probably open enrollment up to the Choice Program to fill their seats.

#### 7.8 APS SC statement regarding Regional District Study – *Mike Coppolino*

John Petersen read the Town Meeting motion. He emphasized that drafting this new regional agreement is a significant task. He said that it is important that if people go forward with this work, they are clearly instructed to draft a voteable agreement to present at the Acton and Boxborough Town Meetings a year from now.

Mike read the proposed statement submitted by Dennis Bruce. Steve Mills read Bridget Bieber's email that said at the Boxborough School Committee meeting next Monday night, the Committee will discuss new information and whether to revote the Regionalization issue.

Dr. Mills said that as superintendent, he feels very strongly that regionalizing K-12 with Boxborough would be a very good thing. Eliminating the duplication of services and work would result in financial savings that could be applied to educational needs for the students. It was noted that regionalization would result in more transportation reimbursement funding. Xuan spoke in support stating that regionalization would create opportunity to put resources back into the classroom to improve the educational learning experience for the students, without burdening the taxpayers.

Mary Brolin spoke as a Regional School District Study Committee member. She said that the Boxborough School Committee and the Study Committee would be revisiting the issue and revoting it next week due to new information about how a regional school committee could vote. Currently voting on the Regional School Committee is weighted according to population. A secondary source at the DESC shared information from state law outlining five ways to convene a regional committee. It will be important that everyone keep an open mind about new ways to do things.

Many of the Committee members thanked everyone involved in this significant and complicated activity. Mike Coppolino concluded that, "Everything should be up for consideration because this is a new agreement."

Xuan noted that everyone will know that Acton will be the majority due to size, but most votes are very consistent over the years of working together on the Regional School Committee. The members all share the same goal for excellent education.

John Petersen moved, and it was seconded and unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the proposed statement as amended in support of regionalization K-12 with Boxborough

7.9 Recommendation to Approve Gift to Gates School from Community Education Math Olympiad

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

**VOTED:** to accept with gratitude, \$3,200 from the Gates School portion of the surplus generated by Community Education's Math Olympiad program offered at Gates this year.

8.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION

8.4 Coordinated Program Review

Liza Huber reported that the Conant School is now in compliance per the CPR. She said that moving the autism program students more into the mainstream areas of the school has been well received.

NEXT MEETINGS

March 22, 7:00 pm JT SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

Exec with 7:15 regular start

April 2, 6:00 pm JT SC at ABRHS (pre Town Meeting, if needed)

April 3, 6:00 pm JT SC at ABRHS (pre Town Meeting, if needed)

May 3, 7:30 pm AB SC at R.J. Grey Junior High Library

May 17, 7:00 pm APS SC at Conant School

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 9:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

## ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Cafetorium  
Gates School

March 15, 2012  
7:00 p.m.

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### AGENDA with addendum

- 1.0 CALL TO ORDER (7:00)
- 2.0 CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION
- 3.0 STATEMENT OF WARRANT
- 4.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - 4.1 APS SC February 16, 2012 (*addendum*)
- 5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- 6.0 EDUCATION REPORT – *Lynne Newman, Principal, Gates School (7:05)*
- 7.0 APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS (7:30)
  - 7.1 Health Insurance Plan Design Working Group– *Marie Altieri (oral)*
  - 7.2 Acton Health Insurance Trust Report – *John Petersen (oral)*
  - 7.3 FY'13 Budget (7:35)
    - 7.3.1 ALG Report – *Xuan Kong*
      - 7.3.1.1 Materials from 3/8/12 meeting
      - 7.3.1.2 Revised ALG spreadsheet, post meeting
    - 7.3.2 Acton Finance Committee Report – *Xuan Kong*
      - 7.3.2.1 *Meeting on 3/6/12 (oral)*
    - 7.3.3 Classroom Assistants
      - 7.3.3.1 Before/After School Program Review – *Steve Mills*
      - 7.3.3.2 Letters of Support from PTO/PTSO Co-Chairs
  - 7.4 FY'12 Budget, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Report – *Don Aicardi (7:55)*
  - 7.5 Policy Update
    - 7.5.1 Revision: Assignment of Elementary Students from Other Schools File: JCAC –  
**SECOND READING - VOTE** – *Marie Altieri*  
(Vote postponed to the next APS SC meeting on May 17<sup>th</sup>)
  - 7.6 Kindergarten Registration Update – *Marie Altieri (will bring to meeting) (8:10)*
  - 7.7 Acton Students attending Blanchard – *Marie Altieri (oral)*
  - 7.8 APS SC statement regarding Regional District Study – *Mike Coppolino (oral) (8:30)*
  - 7.9 Recommendation to Approve Gift to Gates School from Community Education Math Olympiad– **VOTE** – *Steve Mills (addendum)*
- 8.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION (8:40)
  - 8.1 Pupil Services
    - 8.1.1 ELL Student Enrollment Report – March 1
  - 8.2 FY'12 Monthly APS Financial Reports
  - 8.3 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info – March 1 (*addendum*)
  - 8.4 Coordinated Program Review: Conant School in compliance (*oral*)
  - 8.5 Correspondence from the Community (*none*)

Materials for this meeting are posted at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>

- 8.6 Town Elections – *Mike Coppolino (oral)*  
Acton election is March 27<sup>th</sup>. 3 School Committee candidates running for 2 seats:  
Dennis Bruce, Adria Cohen, Deanne O’Sullivan

8.7 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>

- 8.8 “Pledge” Case update (if needed)

- 8.9 Acton Town Meeting Warrant Articles (*addendum*)

- 8.10 Spring Community Education Catalogue is posted at

<http://comed.ab.mec.edu/pdf/Website%20catalog%20spring%2012.pdf>

9.0 NEXT MEETINGS

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ADJOURNMENT (9:00)