

ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEES
Minutes (approved 2/7/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

Saturday, January 26, 2013
8:30 a.m. Joint SC Executive Session*
9:00 a.m. – 1:50 p.m. Joint and ABR SC Budget Presentations
2:00 Acton Public SC Budget Presentations

<i>Members Present:</i>	Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan
<i>Members Absent:</i>	None
<i>Others:</i>	Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Xuan Kong and the Acton Public School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Kim McOsker at 8:34 a.m.

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:35 a.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, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O’Sullivan)
Xuan Kong declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session after the executive session.

At 8:35 a.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 - Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, O’Sullivan)
Kim McOsker declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session after the executive session.

At 8:58 a.m., the Committees were polled and voted to go out of Joint Executive Session.

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE APS AND ABRSD FY’14 BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

AB Warrant #13-016 dated 1/24/13 in the amount of \$2,868,218.15 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures. APS Warrant #201315 dated 1/22/13 in the amount of \$88,815.46 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

Xuan Kong stated that the ABRSC would vote a preliminary FY14 budget at the end of their meeting so it could be presented at the Budget Hearing on 2/7/13, per the Regional Agreement.

9:00 Superintendent’s Introduction

Dr. Mills stated that the school budgets must be a statement of values, the product of teamwork and transparent. The proposals are consistent with the Long Range Strategic Plan and based on sound financial management in compliance with the Acton FinCom’s Point-of-View document calling for reductions to match any additions. His FY14 investment budget calls for an increase of 2.2% for APS and

approximately 4% for ABRSD. No federal stimulus money made this budget more challenging. Specific additions proposed for FY14 are:

- APS – ½ time assistant principal at Douglas, counseling ,ELE support, professional learning
- ABRSD - 2 English teachers, bridges program, professional learning

The Futures Education audit suggested that some special education expenses could be reimbursed by Medicaid. This is being confirmed. These savings of potentially \$100,000 per district are not included in this budget. State budget numbers are also not confirmed yet. Dr. Mills concluded by asking for the Committees' support and acknowledging that a 5% or 6% increase in assessment for either Acton or Boxborough is not sustainable over time.

9:15 FY'14 School Budget Overview

Don Aicardi asked the Committees to support an ABRSD FY14 preliminary budget of \$40,775,000, a 4.24% increase from final FY13. He asked for support of the APS FY14 preliminary budget of \$27,130,000, a 2.14% increase from final FY13. Don cautioned that as budgets are being constructed more tightly each year, turnback potentiality (replenishing reserves at end of year) decreases. Concerns about reserve use, contracting local revenue, and cooling Chapter 70 increases have meant that budgets have grown much more slowly since FY09. OPEB liability will also play an increasingly important role.

9:35 Human Resources & Enrollment Update

Marie Altieri reported that all employee categories have existing employees' salaries going up 2.5% including steps (if any). Any new staff has been offset by reductions in staff in FTE. Where enrollment has decreased, staff has been reduced accordingly. She noted a large number of teacher retirements this year (16). Each salary has been reduced in the budget to an estimated replacement salary of Master's step 4 (\$54,341). She said that collective bargaining is in progress, but changes are not expected to this budget.

Acton Fincom member Bob Evans stated that the town of Acton has added an OPEB surcharge for new employees in their budget. He asked if the School Committees had committed to doing this for FY14 and if not, why not. Don Aicardi responded that the administration wants the budget process to progress a bit further to see if adding a surcharge makes sense. He does not feel comfortable adding one at this time. Mike Coppolino suggested that some information might be presented slightly differently given that the Acton Fincom gave the Committees input about the pluses and minuses of counting FTEs. They feel counting part time pieces is not really equivalent to adding a psychologist or English teacher. Regarding the upcoming drop in enrollment, Marie noted that one result will be that classes adhere to the School Committees' class size guidelines. Currently, we have many classes over those guidelines. Marie confirmed that nine full time support positions have been replaced with part time positions this year, saving the cost of health care benefits, at the Superintendent's direction.

9:50 Pupil Services

Liza Huber introduced some of her staff in attendance. She discussed her organization chart, Futures Education preliminary feedback and the FY13 spectrum of services for students.

When asked if some out-of-district students may return to our classrooms if Bridges is added at the High School, Liza replied yes, but it takes time to transition back and be sure each student can access the curriculum at the right level. For our specialized programs we have offered slots, where available, for tuition students from other communities. Mary Emmons added that while 20 students are expected in the program, it will be very comprehensive and may benefit other students who require higher level transition support for some of their needs. Liza said that currently students are being served in the learning center model at the High School although it is not very efficient and some coordination is missing.

In response to a question, Dr. Mills said that a contract with Futures was signed to pay a flat fee of \$12,500 to review special education services at the Region this year, and they found a possible revenue stream of

\$100,000. Herman Kabakoff suggested that a chart would be helpful showing the percent being spent on special education services.

Dennis Bruce emphasized how valuable all of the information was and requested that at least 5 – 10 minutes be built in for questions after each speaker, even if the day is extended, next year.

10:45 Professional Development / Curriculum

Deborah Bookis presented on the importance of and need for professional learning. She incorporated several video clips of real discussions between our staff illustrating a Critical Friends Group at the High School, math lesson study at the Jr High, and Readers' Notebooks at the elementary level.

When asked for more detail about the comparison between the Acton and state numbers, Deborah explained that the state does not provide strict guidelines about how to report professional development numbers. Across the years though, our districts have always been significantly low. Andrew Shen stated that the administration has always tried to imbed professional development time outside of team time. While in support of collaboration, Mike Coppolino suggested that it might be more cost effective to consider using some of the publicly available videos. Andrew replied that they have tried that as well.

Deanne O'Sullivan asked about the use of technology and specifically the ability to use websites. Deborah explained that hybrid models like moodle are used. Deanne also urged the teachers to use technology to communicate with parents and students more often. Stephanie Hoban explained that professional learning for the teachers is expanding, including summer classes that have waiting lists. She said that moving to abschools (a google app for education) allows the Districts to move beyond classroom teachers just using email. ABSchools provides a suite of applications for all teachers. Google docs is also a significant resource for collaboration and she expects to see explosive growth in that area.

Herman Kabakoff referred to last year's comment about the poor condition of many of our textbooks and asked for an update. Deborah said that a large purchase was done last year, resulting in all elementary schools now having level guided libraries. For the Junior High and High School, departments purchased some new books. They now have \$40,000 for textbooks a year to purchase texts on an as needed basis.

When asked how the additional \$120,000 will be used, Deborah replied that it will provide more time for teachers, but the Administration is not wedded to any one model yet. Leadership opportunities must be provided for teachers so they are trying to capitalize on our teachers' strengths, understanding that we must pay our teachers for their time. In addition, some experts are being brought in, such as those from Columbia University's Teachers' College.

Bill Guthlein asked if Thursday afternoons are for self directed teacher development in the elementary schools, as many parents believe. Deborah said that teachers contractually must stay until the end of the school day when students leave. If they stay later, they can take advantage of the opportunities offered, but there is no requirement to do that. Nancy Sherburne asked if there was any discussion of using the increased time and resources specifically for special education professional development for regular education staff. When Deborah answered yes, Nancy asked if perhaps it could be an annual mandatory training. Deborah said that making it mandatory was a challenge.

11:30 R.J. Grey Junior High School

Although the Junior High has no proposals or requests for FY14, Principal Andrew Shen shared his thoughts about possible future projects. He described the library re-design and emphasis on integrating technology, including a desire to replace a mobile lab and Learning Center desktops, where computers are 8 – 11 years old. He would also like to redesign the science labs for more educationally flexible use.

11:40 Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

Principal Alixe Callen talked about the changing nature of education where "Teaching is the unit of measurement." has been replaced with "Learning is the unit of measurement." Further differentiated instruction is needed and the Common Core requires reading/writing across the curriculum. These are

areas where the High School currently feels understaffed. Some initiatives with no budget impact have been implemented to increase personalization between students and staff, but she has two requests that are in the FY14 budget: Two new English teachers and the Bridges program for students with autism spectrum disorders with high cognition. Alixe also presented a list of unfunded capital needs.

Alixé stated that adding the 2 English teachers would get that department to where it should be. Mike Coppolino feels success can be measured by SGP data. He hopes there is some accountability in the future. Alixe agreed but emphasized that the discussion is about individual kids and looking for commonality. When asked, Alixe said she cannot get to 4 sections by adding only one English teacher. Two additional are needed for students to conference sufficiently and to realize the directed study goal for teachers including \$30,000 in savings. Xuan stated that section per teacher is an administrative decision and the School Committee decides how much funding to allocate to the English department. The Committee discussed how sections are planned and how other districts handle it, including requiring teachers to do duties beyond their teaching sections.

The Committee discussed the effect of future enrollment on teaching load. Alixe emphasized that many sections are small in size, and the planning is incredibly complex so it's not possible to use a straight calculation. Alixe said that student load is being addressed now, but class size still needs to be addressed.

Paul Murphy is relieved to see that two teachers are requested, keeping in mind safety issues. He questioned calling this an investment budget, given that it is really only putting the schools on par with other communities. Deanne O'Sullivan agreed saying that bringing in more teachers increases student – teacher interaction, a key point “no matter what literature you read”. It also reduces some pressure and stress on the students. Regarding the lower SGP scores for English, (44 compared to 73 for Math) she noted that English is required for any subject and it affects every other curriculum. Dr. Mills said that the English scores are lower for English because English teachers need more time to work directly with students and 4 sections are needed to do this sufficiently.

A lunch break was taken.

12:45 Facilities and Transportation

JD Head highlighted the schools' dramatic drop in energy consumption, approximately 2 years ahead of the planned “Green Community” schedule. Student involvement has been very enthusiastic. Because the Energy Advisor position was originally funded by grants, the Committee asked JD to explain the position's value added. JD summarized that for every \$1 of salary, \$4 of savings was generated. Although these savings may not continue at this rate in future years, the position is clearly valuable. JD would like to do as many as possible of the capital projects on his list if there is money left at end of year.

1:00 Educational Technology

Stephanie Hoban presented for Amy Bisiewicz. She emphasized the Long Range Strategic Plan and how Access, Use and Understanding are considered for each year's progress. Year 2 is this year.

1:15 A-B Community Education

Dr. Mills introduced Erin Bettez saying that Community Education is an amazing program started by Bill Ryan that contributed \$400,000 back to the schools and community in FY12. The Lower Fields project is the current focus. Draft advertising plans are in progress, as well as plans for concessions. FOLF is working on a March tournament. An RFP has been put out for online registration.

1:30 ABRSC Budget Discussion and VOTE on Preliminary FY'14 Budget

Don Aicardi explained the preliminary budget vote process as outlined in the current Regional Agreement. Dennis Bruce moved, and Maria Neyland seconded the motion:

recommends that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 be set at \$40,694,750 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 \$26,633,228, Boxborough \$5,861,591, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,725,844, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$78,966, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$624,462, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$770,000, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

Mike Coppolino asked if this was the time to recommend changes to the budget or wait until the next meeting. Xuan said the next meeting. Mike has not run the numbers for his suggestions yet. He feels the reduction in terms of class load is sufficient to justify adding one English teacher, but not two. He thinks a 2 ½% increase for administrative staff salary is too much right now and advocated for a 1 ½ % increase. Several members spoke in support of adding the two teachers. Maria Neyland stated that although members must take into account taxpayers and the community, the teachers and administration are saying this is a real need. She supports them. Dennis Bruce stated that the day's information presented is invaluable but he'd like more time for questions. He is conflicted about adding two English teachers, although the SGP number bothers him. He asked if head count ever goes down.

Dr. Mills will consider redesigning Budget Saturday next year to give more time after each section for questions if that is what the Committees would like. Lowering headcount would be a service reduction. Over the next years, there will be pressure to lower staffing due to the numbers. He said that the 5.7% increase for Acton includes OPEB. The increase would be 4.2% without OPEB. Dr. Mills agreed to run the numbers as suggested by Mike Coppolino.

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee VOTE:

The motion to accept the preliminary FY14 ABRSD budget was unanimously approved.

Xuan informed the School Committees that the two Regionalization School District Study Committee Chairs would come to the Feb 7 ABRSC meeting to explain why the Subcommittee has voted to not continue their effort.

1:45 Joint SC Discussion re Assault Weapon Statement

Dennis Bruce worked with Brigid Bieber on the draft letter. The Committee discussed to whom the letter should be sent and how that would affect the wording. Posting the letter and asking for the public to join in signing it was discussed. Comments should be sent to Dennis and Brigid. A vote will be taken at the Feb 7th meeting.

AB Regional School Committee adjourned at 2:13 p.m. APS SC Meeting continued at 2:20 p.m.

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS FY14 BUDGET PRESENTATION

Dr. Mills introduced his APS team: Liza Huber – Director of Pupil Services, Damian Sugrue – Conant Principal, Christopher Whitbeck – Douglas Principal, Lynne Newman – Gates Principal, David Krane – McCarthy-Towne Principal, Edward Kaufman – Merriam Principal, Priscilla Kotyk – Assistant Principal, Matthew McDowell – Assistant Principal, and Suzanne Szwarczewicz-ELE k-12 Chairperson.

The proposed APS FY14 Investment Budget includes the addition of .6 FTE ELE Teacher and 1.0 FTE School Psychologist for Conant/Gates/Douglas schools, at a cost of \$94,574 plus \$14,000 for health insurance. It also includes a request for .5 FTE Assistant Principal at Douglas for \$43,000.

Liza described how current services are provided by a 1.0 psychologist shared between McCarthy-Towne and Merriam following the regional model. An additional 1.0 psychologist is shared between Conant/Douglas/Gates but there is no direct work with students. With the additional psychologist, all of these professionals would be providing direct service to students. These services are sometimes paid through contracted services. Nancy Sherburne stated that the SpedPAC supports the proposed budgets and programs at Douglas and Gates are their biggest concerns K-6. She spoke about how difficult it is for these children and families to have to switch school for later grades when services are no longer offered.

Lynne Newman spoke for all of the principals about the value of the Assistant Principals. Dr. Mills emphasized that full time Assistant Principals are needed in the next few years.

Tracey Smith, PTSO Co-chair at McCarthy-Towne School read a statement in support of continued funding of classroom assistants. She noted that the third installment of this funding is not in the proposed FY14 budget, as originally planned. She disagreed with Dr. Mills' comment in the Beacon that funding pressure has been relieved by the first two installments. While she supports the ELE and Douglas Assistant Principal additions, with some grades having as many 27 students per class, the need to fundraise and the pressure on PTOs remains. Dr. Mills thanked Ms. Smith for speaking up, and said that adding \$108,000 to the proposed budget for the February meeting could be an option for the Committee to consider.

The Acton Public School Committee adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of documents used: see agenda

ABRSD FY14 Budget Hearing is Thursday, 2/7/13 at 7:30 pm in R.J. Grey Junior High Library.

APS FY14 Budget Hearing is Thursday, 2/14/13 at 7:00 pm in R.J. Grey Junior High Library.