

**ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES (approved 12/6/12)**

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

**October 4, 2012
7:30 p.m. Joint School Committee
followed by AB Regional School Committee Meeting
followed by ABRSC Executive Session**

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan
Members Absent: None
Others: 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 7:34 p.m.

CHAIRMAN’S INTRODUCTION

Xuan Kong announced that there will be a live debate on Acton TV between Senator James Eldridge and Dean Cavaretta on October 17th at 7pm.

Xuan and the Committee welcomed new Boxborough member, Dr. Mary Brolin. Mary thanked the Boxborough Board of Selectmen and School Committee for appointing her to fill Bruce Sabot’s seat.

The FY13 ABRHS School Committee student representatives were welcomed: Caroline (Coco) DeFrancesco, Jennie He, Jacob Johnson, Tess Little, and Nikhil Manocha. The students said they are very excited to participate and represent ABRHS.

STATEMENT of WARRANT

AB warrant #13-006M dated 9/13/12 in the amount of \$127,374.75, warrant #13-007 dated 9/20/12 in the amount of \$1,849,588.12, and warrant #13-008 dated 10/4/12 in the amount of \$2,013,695.49 were signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APS warrant #201307 dated 10/2/12 in the amount of \$205,595.29 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL of MINUTES

The minutes of the 9/6/12 Joint/AB/APS School Committee meeting were approved as amended. Mary Brolin abstained from voting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Student Rep Jacob Johnson spoke regarding teacher evaluations and a role for students based on the discussion in the Spring. He advocated for more student interactions input to be included, particularly for High School staff. He also suggested that department heads be involved. He cited a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2010 about the effect of teaching on test scores. He believes the data shows that students can give effective evaluations. The goal is to give teachers constructive criticism. Jacob was thanked for sharing his thoughts. More discussion will take place on this topic in the future.

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- 5.1 Acton BOS and FinCom Report
 - 5.1.1 Finance Committee meeting of 9/25/12

Paul Murphy reported that there was nothing relevant to report from the BOS.
Kim McOsker reported that Don Aicardi and Steve Mills presented at the Acton Fincom meeting on 9/25/12. Regular meetings will be set up for them to report back.

5.2 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Report

Xuan reported that ALG met 9/13/12 hoping to get to consensus. Fincom wants earlier dialogue re the budget process from School Committee. It was suggested that all boards meet as a group to get to know each other better. It was decided that no substitutions in attendance will be permitted this year.

5.2.1 Input to ALG on Revenue Assumptions; Split Allocation; Override/No Override

Xuan explained the split and how money was divided. This will be on the ALG agenda. Xuan asked for School Committee to address these issues so that they could be brought back to ALG in a timely manner.

5.2 Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Report

Maria Neyland reported that the BLF discussed their budget timeline. The Boards were asked to have their budget numbers in just before Thanksgiving. An update on Regionalization was given. Lots of questions were asked about the Lower Fields, such as is it coming in on budget, and how much rental income is coming in.

5.3 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis Bruce reported that the town wide OPEB committee kicked off on 10/3/12. Steve Noone is chair. Discussion took place regarding how tough the issue could be but there are a lot of good ideas about funding. The goal is to bring a recommendation forward at the 12/13/12 ALG meeting, although this is later than they hoped. Don was thanked for his valuable participation. Guidance may come from the state in December. Maria said Boxborough does not have a subcommittee for OPEB but a transfer was voted in May. Xuan referred to Tess Summers' memo in the packet.

5.4 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update/Issues

Xuan reported that the RSDSC met on 9/12/12 for a presentation by Roger Hatch and Melissa King from the Office of School Finance, DESE. The highlight was a DESE FY13 Chapter 70 simulation study for the expanded district showing a \$150,000 loss from the individual aid currently received by the three districts. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is not good news. The Committee was urged to keep in mind that the slides are a simulation, not actual.

Mike Coppolino contacted Senator James Eldridge and the Senator suggested that a letter be sent to him from the three School Committees as an official request expressing their concern over being penalized by the funding formula. The three chairs will compose and send this letter for the Committees.

There is a very important meeting next Wednesday night on Regionalization that Dr. Mills urged all to attend. Specifically, the meeting will try to reach consensus on three outstanding issues:

1. Governing structure of the new Region
2. 5% issue discount currently given to Boxborough for new construction
3. How to divide up savings between the two Towns

Dr. Bates and Dr. Mills discussed questions that have come up from the public that would not be addressed in a Regional Agreement. The memo in the packet represents only the Superintendents' views at this time. Resolution of these issues would take further discussion, including School Committee action, contract negotiation with unions, and discussion with the public. The Study Committee members were urged to keep a long term timeframe in mind for many of these important questions.

Dr. Mills said a possible date for the Special Town Meetings in both towns is Monday, April 29, 2013. Deanne O'Sullivan asked that the RSDSC website be updated to include the latest material. Maria emphasized that the Chairs of the three school committees, Kim, Xuan and Maria need to discuss any

position statements before they are posted, or be very clear about what the statement is saying and who it is from. Xuan confirmed that the three school committee chairs will create a position statement that addresses items that do not belong in the Regional Agreement. The next meeting of the RSDSC is 10/10/12.

5.5 EDCO FY13 Representatives (Voting Board members and Advisory members)

When the subcommittees and positions were voted at the 6/28/12 School Committee meeting, the EDCO Advisory Board positions were not included. EDCO Board members voted in on 6/28/12 were Brigid Bieber for the ABRSC and Steve Mills for the APSC.

AB VOTE:

Mike moved, Mary seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that Steve Mills be the EDCO Advisory Representative for ABRSC.

APS VOTE:

Mike moved, Paul seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that Xuan Kong be the EDCO Advisory Representative for APSC.

5.6 FY 13 SMART Goals

Dr. Mills said that there are fewer goals this year but they are more focused. He will accept comments or changes on the goals at any time. Goal #1 is an academic goal around student assessments from Deb Bookis. This is a sea change for our community but Dr. Mills wants to begin addressing it. He encourages his staff to take risks, saying that it is ok to not completely fulfill a goal as long as you have given it your best effort. Goal #2 regarding pupil services emphasizes transparency and efficiency. He has just begun working with an outside audit firm to look for efficiencies. Dr. Mills emphasized that this is not a goal to reduce special education services. Goal #3 is about the districts' financial plans including the revolving accounts. Dr. Mills recognized and thanked Tom Blondin, the financial analyst hired last year, for being in the audience. A full financial discussion of the revolving accounts will be done by Don Aicardi and Tom in December. Marie Altieri's Goal #4 regarding Teacher Evaluation dramatically changes how they will be evaluated. Goal #5 describes how Amy Bisiewicz and her team are moving students and staff to abschools.org and utilizing all the resources that that technology offers. Dr. Mills continues to try to make these goals quantifiable and measurable.

Mike Coppolino stated that the "R" in SMART represents "student academic outcomes" and asked that the measurable outcomes be as tied to student academic outcomes as appropriate. He also suggested that some of the outcomes be more quantifiable with numeric specifics. John Petersen spoke from the audience suggesting that Goal #4's statement of purpose should not be to pilot a new educator evaluation system, but to migrate to a new system.

The APS SC adjourned at 8:30 p.m. and the ABRSC continued.

ABRSC BUSINESS

6.1 Recommendation to Approve Revised FY' 13 ABRSD Assessments

Don Aicardi explained that every October the District is required to submit "excess and deficiency" (E&D) information to the Department of Revenue. Because the final amounts of Chapter 70 revenue, Choice/Charter Assessment and Charter School Aid were \$250,804 greater than the revenue assumptions used at both Town Meetings last spring, the Committee must decide how to deal with this change. Because this vote does not increase the assessment of either Acton or Boxborough, nor the total amount of the FY13 budget in any way, the Committee can make this decision without a Town Meeting vote. The recommended option is to lower the amount of E&D used, keeping the District under that statutory 5% (of the operating budget) cap limit. Don stated that this is terrific news. Mike Coppolino asked if either Finance Committee had advice on this topic. Maria Neyland said that Boxborough Fincom did not.

Maria Neyland moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013 be set at \$39,114,804 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 \$25,193,314, Boxborough \$5,901,118, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,659,200, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$108,536, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$732,782, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$519,196, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

6.2 Long Range Financial Planning

Xuan Kong presented on “Why Conduct Historical Expenditure Review?” He stated that the AB School Budget is a statement of the value of education of our community. He compared budgets to reality and asked the Committee to consider whether actual expenditures were more informative than budgeted figures. Mike thanked Xuan for “one of the most effective presentations he has seen at a School Committee meeting”.

6.2.1 Historical Review slides and worksheet

Don Aicardi presented on what the past could teach us about upcoming financial challenges, stating that:

- High School Building Capacity increased by FY05
- CPR review of FY04-05 led to additional staffing to address “990” concerns by FY07 and FY08
- Class Size Average worsened from FY02 to FY07; and then improved
- ABRSD population from FY02 to FY06 increased markedly and has slowed more recently
- School Choice funds supported seven positions as late as FY11; supports 2.8 positions in FY13.

The historical review concluded that:

1. Formula change in the Education Reform Act, along with student enrollment increases, drove the large Chapter 70 increases in FY08 and FY09. The slowing of our student population will mean that any growth in Chapter 70 will increase at a much more conservative level. It is unlikely that the large increases similar to the ones that began five years ago will occur again unless there is another review of the Education Reform law.
2. The ABRSD’s reserves, known as E & D, remain at or slightly below the statutory limit as the ABRSD enters a new, more austere financial era.
3. The following have contributed to holding budget authorization growth to 2.0%, from FY10 to FY13: tightening the technical calculations of the budget, municipal reforms and negotiated changes in the employee-employer ratios that have slowed the budgetary growth, the Health Insurance Trust balance that has kept recent annual rate increases low; and successful efforts to control spending, such as in utilities.
4. Budgetary increases for level service alone will likely be well over 3%. The “austere budget” increases of the last several years will no longer be possible due to a combination of flat Chapter 70 revenue, the non-availability of federal revenue, and already authorized spending commitments.

The School Committee and the Administration will collectively have to balance the Long Range Strategic Plan against a very challenging financial picture.

6.2.2 FY14 Preliminary Budget Priorities and Calendar

Dr. Mills said that this is the very beginning of a discussion that will go on for the upcoming months, through “Budget Saturday” on January 26, 2013 and up to the Town Meetings in April and May. He described the budget as something that has to be “pruned, so more of the flowers can grow”. He acknowledged that the investment budget is beyond level service, but it is based on the Long Range Strategic Plan and sound financial management. There is more money in reserves now than when he arrived as Superintendent. The Regional School District’s bond rating has also improved. Dr. Mills stated that there are steadily increasing demands being put on all teachers beyond the classroom, such as more complicated evaluations, ELL requirements, and mandates. More professional learning time opportunities are needed. The school budgets are a reflection of a community’s values. He looks forward to working

with the towns' finance committees and other community members to put successful budgets in place for next year.

His preliminary FY14 budget proposal includes:

- 2 Additional English Teachers at the High School
- Connections/Bridges Program
- Increase Drug/Alcohol Counseling Hours
- Increase Opportunities for Professional Learning

Xuan asked the Committee to come to the next meeting ready to share their priorities for the Regional School District for the coming years. Members mentioned class size and enrollment as key issues. Thanks to the position added this year, the counselor load at the High School went from 240 students to 219. With the 2 English teachers added this year, the student load now is 110 – 105 students per teacher, a big improvement. The issue now is that there is no time during the day to meet with students to discuss their work. Two more teachers would keep the same load, but add time for staff to work directly with students.

Dr. John D'Auria, President of Teachers21, presented to APS/ABRSD staff this week and emphasized that the focus in schools now is moving away from TEACHING and to LEARNING. Learning requires time and knowing the student. Four classes per day would be optimal. Our schools are nowhere near the staff load of 90 students that Concord-Carlisle and other towns have.

Brigid Bieber said that Open House at the High School was "Fantastic!" She noted the new computers that she saw in one of the classrooms as a striking example of the direct impact on student learning that the Committee's budget discussions can have. She was impressed with how much further into the curriculum the students were because of the faster computers that don't crash like the old ones used to.

John Petersen spoke from the audience citing the Boston Magazine rankings article and the notable per pupil spending column. The ABRSD ratio is considerably lower than Lexington, Concord-Carlisle, Lincoln Sudbury or any of the communities we compare to. He pointed out that this relates to the student – teacher ratio in a negative way but emphasizes that it does show that the District delivers excellent education with good efficiency.

6.3 Recommendation to Approve Field Trip to Dominican Republic

Dr. Mills stated that this is a community service learning trip, not just a cultural experience.

Maria moved, Brigid seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the High School Field Trip to the Dominican Republic.

6.4 Recommendation to Approve Exchange/Field Trip to China

This is a High School trip for next summer. A goal of Dr. Callen and her staff is to establish an annual student exchange. She and some of her staff members went to China last year and took a very close look with an eye toward safety at the schools and places where our students would be. This could be a pilot for our students to earn credit. The trip would be for students who had just finished 10th and 11th grades.

Brigid moved, Mike seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the High School Trip to China

Xuan asked the School Committee if they wanted to participate in the Acton Finance Committee sponsored "All Board" meeting to share thoughts about the boards' long range financial plans. The Committee agreed that they would like to participate. The date is not set yet.

Xuan asked the Committee for their view of the FY14 Budget, Chapter 70 aid and any input for ALG. Mike Coppolino stated that he wanted no override and to keep the split as is. He is generally comfortable with the outlook for the state aid increase from current funding level. Maria Neyland said it is very early to say anything about state aid for next year.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.4 FY12 MCAS Results

Dr. Mills complimented Deborah Bookis on a very well done report. He said that we continue to be suspect about the relativeness and usefulness of these tests. Some of it is helpful, but he and Deb stressed that there are many other measures to also use. Deb said that MCAS is a summative assessment that helps with curriculum alignment, and seeing patterns that over time can help identify weaknesses and gaps in curriculum. It also can be used as a screen to identify students who may need intervention.

Specifically, two areas that have been identified for attention are the aggregate median SGP for 10th grade English Language Arts, and the median SGP for the SWD subgroup at the Junior High. An item analysis of the ELA results showed that at grades 7 and 10 students did not do well in multiple choice and open response questions that focused on using text evidence to support answers in literature and informational text. This is one of the major shifts of the CC or new MA Frameworks and where MCAS can be a helpful tool to help identify weaknesses in curriculum. For mathematics, the Jr High High Needs Group CPI (achievement) declined slightly and is being reviewed.

7.6 Notification of Pesticide Use on 9/19/12

Dr. Mills highlighted the recent and very serious EEE outbreaks. He approved the spraying of all school fields.

7.7 Boston's Best High Schools 2012: *Boston Magazine*

Dr. Mills highlighted this. APS/AB is ranked 9th, but per pupil spending is used as a metric and this hurts the District. He stated that this ranking is a tremendous tribute to our entire school community.

In response to only having water at School Committee meetings this year, Mike asked that any decision that affects School Committee members be discussed at a meeting. The chairs made this decision based on other town committees not serving refreshments at meetings, and the increased focus on health and wellness.

Xuan mentioned that the Mass. Association of School Committees (MASC) meeting is on November 9th and all School Committee members are invited to attend.

AB EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 10:30 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, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O'Sullivan)

Xuan Kong declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session for the sole purpose of adjourning.

At 10:35 p.m., the Committee was polled and voted to go out of Joint Executive Session.

NEXT MEETINGS

- October 18, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library, Education Report: *David Krane*, Principal of McCarthy-Towne School
- November 1, 7:30 pm, ABRSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda