

**ACTON PUBLIC AND ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING Minutes (approved 1/8/13)**

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

**December 6, 2012
7:30 p.m. Joint School Committee
followed by AB Regional School Committee Meeting
followed by Joint SC 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 7:35 p.m.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Xuan Kong asked members of the public who wished to speak about the school calendar to sign up. Given the full agenda, the large audience and the many emails received, he requested a 2 minute maximum per person.

APPROVAL of MINUTES and STATEMENT of WARRANT

AB warrant #13-011 dated 11/15/12 in the amount of \$1,444,807.74 and warrant #13-012 dated 11/29/12 in the amount of \$2,041,869.12 were signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures. APS warrant #201311 dated 11/27/12 in the amount of \$180,170.76 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

The minutes of the 10/4/12 Joint/AB/APS School Committee meeting were approved unanimously by the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee, followed by the Acton Public School Committee.

The minutes of the 10/18/12 Joint AB/APS School Committee and Regional School District Study Committee meeting were approved by the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee, followed by the Acton Public School Committee. Dennis Bruce abstained from both votes.

The minutes of the 11/1/12 Joint/AB School Committee meeting were approved unanimously by the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee, followed by the Acton Public School Committee.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

5.1 ABRSD FY'14 Budget Overview

5.1.1 Governor's Fiscal Stability Measures for FY13, 12/4/12

Dr. Mills introduced the Budget Overview stating that this will be one of the most difficult budgets he has ever done. Don Aicardi discussed the effects of Governor Patrick's recently announced mid-year 9C reductions. At the end of October 2012, the estimated shortfall for the state was \$256 million. At the end of November 2012, the estimated shortfall had increased to \$540 million. \$21.7 million of the cuts that do not require Legislative Approval are expected to come from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for FY13. These are expected to involve reimbursements from: Special Education Circuit Breaker, Charter School Tuition and Regional Transportation.

Don reviewed the use of reserves concluding that the Region is \$63,000 under the 5% cap. His estimated level service figures from FY13 to FY14 show an increase of 4.37% or \$1.7 million. Don stressed slide 22 showing the significant projected increase in the FY14 assessment for the town of Acton (6.4%), compared to no increase for Boxborough's assessment, due to a drop in enrollment of Boxborough students based on three-year average. Competition between funding OPEB and current operating needs has also started.

Chapter 70 state funding increases have been slowed over the years. The loss of the Federal EdJobs funding will be felt on Health Insurance from FY13 to FY14. The Administration will be monitoring many items over the next few weeks and months as state funding becomes clearer. More details will be provided at the January School Committee meetings and on Budget Saturday (1/26/13).

Xuan emphasized that the current ALG plan uses \$1.5 - \$2 million of reserves inclusive of E and D. This would only support approximately 3% of an increase and will be an important point for future discussion.

5.2 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update

5.2.1 Draft Position Statement from APS/BPS/ABRSC Chairs – **VOTE**

5.2.2 Merriam School Community emails and Chair's memo

5.2.3 Outreach Opportunities

5.2.4 Douglas School Council Letter

Many public forums have taken place and more are coming up. Excellent feedback and questions are coming in. The first draft of the revised Regional Agreement has come back from the Attorney. Next RSDSC meeting is January 3rd.

ABRSC was asked to vote on the position statement that was already approved by the Acton and Boxborough Public School Committees. Mary Brolin stated that the first item has been raised repeatedly, "Will there be a policy of accepting external funding to offset operating budget expenses (e.g. fundraising for classroom assistants)?" Several members said that any action on this issue is not an issue of regionalization. This funding has been discussed in the Acton schools for a long time and schools are allowed to operate differently. Mary advocated for stating this point more firmly and thanked Kristina Rychlik for her suggested wording.

ABRSC VOTE:

Michael Coppolino moved and it was seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to revise the answer to Question 1 on the proposed position statement to read:

"Currently the Boxborough School Committee has a specific policy prohibiting the use of external funding such as PTSOs to fund any personnel positions. The Acton Public School Committee has a long history of allowing and supporting such funding among all five of their elementary schools. In addition, during the last two budget cycles, they have acted with the intent of relieving pressure on the PTSOs by supporting the budgetary addition of approximately \$50,000 per school for this issue. It is our belief moving forward that the future Regional School Committee should work to support these differences in order to allow for unique and individual programs to continue to function at each of the six elementary schools."

ABRSC VOTE:

Kim McOsker moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the position statement as revised.

APSC VOTE:

Paul Murphy moved, Deanne O'Sullivan seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to revise the answer to Question 1 on the proposed position statement to read:

“Currently the Boxborough School Committee has a specific policy prohibiting the use of external funding such as PTOs to fund any personnel positions. The Acton Public School Committee has a long history of allowing and supporting such funding among all five of their elementary schools. In addition, during the last two budget cycles, they have acted with the intent of relieving pressure on the PTOs by supporting the budgetary addition of approximately \$50,000 per school for this issue. It is our belief moving forward that the future Regional School Committee should work to support these differences in order to allow for unique and individual programs to continue to function at each of the six elementary schools.”

APSC VOTE:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the position statement as revised.

5.3 Proposed 2013-2014 School Calendar – SECOND READING

- 5.3.1 Four Proposed Calendar Options: starting before/after Labor Day, Schools closed/open on certain religious holidays, possible March Professional Development Day noted
- 5.3.2 Summary of Community Emails
- 5.3.3 Calendar Discussion memo including 2012 Staff Survey summary
- 5.3.4 Holiday Observances in MA, DESE
- 5.3.5 School Committee memos re school calendar dated 11/2/12, 6/7/12, 4/30/12
- 5.3.6 School Ceremonies and Religious Holiday Observances Policy and Procedures, File: IMD found at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/policies.shtml>
- 5.3.7 School Year/School Calendar Policy, File: IC/ICA

Xuan Kong reviewed the School Committee policy regarding voting the annual school calendar (IC/ICA). Last year’s decision was very close and as a result, the Superintendent asked the Committee to provide guidance for FY14. Xuan referred to the memo and discussion from last May and June. Calendar A was presented at the 11/1/12 Joint SC meeting for the Committees to consider and potentially vote on 12/6/12. Xuan thanked the Acton Education Association (AEA) for signing a side letter agreeing that the Committee may set the FY14 calendar to begin no earlier than the Monday before Labor Day for teachers.

Dr. Mills stated the importance of decoupling the two issues: starting before or after Labor Day and religious observances. He recommends Calendar A (start before Labor Day and hold school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday) but acknowledged that there are other calendars to consider. He thanked the public for all the heartfelt feedback provided. All material has been collected and reviewed. (See memo and posting.) Marie Altieri has considered staffing to ensure that appropriate coverage would be available. Dr. Mills is on many local education boards (EDCO, CASE) and of the 13 member communities, none of his colleague superintendents have the religious holidays off, including Boxborough. He was surprised about the strong desire to start after Labor Day. He disagrees with this because, as a very high performing school district, if we start after Labor Day and have a few snow days, some students are at a disadvantage. All students have to attend school for 180 days. High School students who take MCAS, AP, SAT and other significant exams will have issues because they must get through a certain amount of material for these exams. Being behind other students when these tests are taken can create issues.

Michael Coppolino read a statement emphasizing that our community has always respected and celebrated diversity and that the school calendar should reflect our community. Advocating for Calendar B, he believes that starting before Labor Day would provide more high quality school time, and not having school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday would avoid a negative impact on the quality of education when substantial numbers of students and staff would be out.

Paul Murphy has “done a 180 on this issue” and is in favor of B. He feels it is not an issue of church and state, but an issue of the community and an act of kindness.

Deanne O'Sullivan advocated for B. She pointed out that Natick and Sharon give 2 days off for Rosh Hashanah because that works for their community. The number of subs needed would be huge if school is held and we would be pulling from all the other communities, not the usual substitute pool.

Kim McOsker asked what has changed since 2010 when the last survey was done. Dr. Mills said he and Marie Altieri could handle the staff being out, and his colleague superintendents all handle the issues.

Brigid Bieber emphasized that the schools have to be respectful of all beliefs, and celebrate diversity, but there has been a significant increase in diversity over the years. She would support all different kinds of holidays in a school calendar, perhaps eliminating a vacation, shortening the day, etc. She advocated for a calendar with either all the holidays our staff and students observe, or none of them. Supporting Calendar A, she stressed that there has to be a practical consideration to show respect to all groups, given that appropriate policies are in place.

Maria Neyland commented on the many emails that referred to stress and students not wanting to take a day off from school. She stated that in her experience, the staff is reasonable and appropriate about children taking religious holidays off. As a public school, she does not believe our schools should close for just two religions' holidays, but asked how it would be decided which religions would be considered. She vowed to work to be sure that all students can practice their religions.

Xuan invited the public to speak, asking those in support of giving students the days off for religious holidays address the Committees first.

Fifteen people spoke, including Rabbi Lewis Mintz from Temple Beth Elohim and Acton Selectwoman Pam Harting Barrat who was on the School Committee 20 years ago when it was decided to have no school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in Acton and Acton-Boxborough schools. Several people said it was the first School Committee meeting they had ever attended.

Student Representative Jacob Johnson stated that it is not fair to give him the day off because he is Jewish, but it is also not fair to cancel school for all religious holidays. He suggested that the question to ask is, "Does the threshold of the Jewish/Christian population meet the burden that would cause school to not be held?" In his opinion it seems to barely meet that threshold, based on the discussion about no homework or testing and 200 parents that said their children would be out on Jewish holidays and even more out on Good Friday.

There were no comments from the public in support of having school on the two religious holidays next year, or on when to start school regarding Labor Day next year.

Xuan thanked the many members of the community at the meeting and all who expressed their opinions over the past several weeks. He encouraged them to continue their participation in School Committee matters.

ABRSC VOTE:

Brigid Bieber moved **to approve the proposed FY14 Calendar A (start before Labor Day and have school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday)**. Maria Neyland seconded.

Kim McOsker spoke against the motion. Emphasizing the importance of spending more time with family, she prefers starting after Labor Day, and has heard from many members of the public who feel the same. Xuan Kong responded that starting after Labor Day 2013, the first day for 8th and 10-12 graders would be one day of the Jewish holiday. This would be a great hardship for them. One member suggested voting on the holidays and start date separately. Xuan replied that the Committees' policy requires a vote on a specific calendar and the Committees asked the Administration to prepare these four proposed calendars.

The motion was VOTED:

YES: Dennis Bruce, Xuan Kong, Maria Neyland, Mary Brolin, Brigid Bieber (7)

NO: Mike Coppolino, Deanne O’Sullivan, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker (8)

The motion lost 8-7.

ABRSC VOTE:

Mike Coppolino moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was

VOTED: to approve the proposed FY14 Calendar B (start before Labor Day and no school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday)

YES: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Paul Murphy, Deanne O’Sullivan, Mike Coppolino (8)

NO: Maria Neyland, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Dennis Bruce (7)

The motion passed 8 – 7.

Brigid requested that the Superintendent research next year if there are other religious holidays that should be considered for calendar discussion. Mary asked that the community be polled for input including opinions about vacations.

APSC VOTE:

Mike Coppolino moved that the proposed FY14 Calendar B be adopted. Deanne O’Sullivan seconded. The motion was withdrawn.

Xuan Kong moved that the proposed FY14 Calendar A be adopted. There was no second.

Mike Coppolino moved that the proposed FY14 Calendar B be adopted. Deanne O’Sullivan seconded.

The motion was VOTED and resulted in a tie.

YES: Mike Coppolino, Deanne O’Sullivan, Paul Murphy (3)

NO: Dennis Bruce, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker (3)

Consequently, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District has an FY14 calendar and the Acton Public Schools do not. The Acton Public School Committee will resume their discussion and vote again on a calendar at their meeting on 12/20/12.

5.4 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Report

Kim McOsker reported on the meeting held on 11/29/12

5.5 Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Report

Maria Neyland reported.

5.6 Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Report

Kim McOsker reported.

5.7 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis Bruce reported that the State commission asked if they could include Acton’s numbers in their study.

5.8 Acton FinCom Report

Dennis Bruce reported that the FinCom needs more information on Regionalization, specifically the educational benefits quantified. They discussed the Point of View (POV) discussion at the last School Committee meeting. Fincom expects a formal response from the Acton Board of Selectmen and School Committees on their POV document.

The APS SC was suspended at 10:04 p.m. and the ABRSC continued.

ABRSC BUSINESS

6.1 Review of Special Revenue Accounts

Special Revenue Accounts are an integral part of the schools' financial resources. Some of the funding comes from district operated programs such as before/after school programs and the integrated pre-school, donations from community organizations like ABSAF and the PTSOs, and fee-based programs such as elementary school band and athletic activity fees. Generally, these are fees charged for non-mandated services or activities. Per state law, accounts separate from the general operating budget are set up to handle the income/expenses related to each special revenue type. The budgets for these funds are not subject to the annual adoption/approval process required by general fund budgets, although expenditures must be specifically related to the purpose for which the funds were established. Examples of other communities' reports were included as a way to provide more complete budget information. The Finance Department's goal is to ensure that the financial information is in a format that facilitates efficient and effective delivery of services. Don Aicardi plans to improve the reports provided to the Superintendent, Administrators and to the Regional School Committee about these accounts.

Dr. Mills stated that this topic is being brought up now as a matter of transparency, not because of issues. The School Committee should be informed about these account and periodic updates will be given. The Committee appreciated this information. Maria Neyland pointed out that because funds are not raised prior to the year in which they are spent, there could be trouble if money does not come in. She asked for dollar amounts, beyond one month, on this topic on Budget Saturday 1/26/13.

6.2 Establishing OPEB Trust

Don Aicardi reported that this is the final stage to approve the legal agreement to establish the OPEB Trust. The draft was included in the 11/1/12 School Committee meeting packet. A minor revision was made to include "her" in "his/her" on one page. Future appropriation to fund OPEB will appear on regional assessment table (also known as Table 6).

Dennis Bruce moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by role call: *that the Committee adopt the attached vote regarding the OPEB Trust*

***Fund. (YES:* Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan)**

The Superintendent will appoint an advisory council committee. One member will be an Acton Finance Committee member and one will be a Boxborough Finance Committee member.

6.3 Recommendation to Approve Field Trip to Quebec, Canada

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Field Trip to Quebec, Canada

6.4 Recommendation to Approve Field Trip to Dublin, Ireland

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded, and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Field Trip to Dublin, Ireland

6.5 Recommendation to Accept Gift of Nordic ski grooming device

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the gift of a Nordic ski grooming device with gratitude

7.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.3 Report on Professional Day, 11/6/12, Deborah Bookis

Dr. Mills highlighted this report. Deborah Bookis added how great it was to have a whole day to focus on student learning with the staff.

7.10 CASE Board of Directors meeting 11/30/12 materials
Xuan Kong asked the Committee to review this information.

APS SC reconvened at 10:46 p.m. and the Joint SC was back in session.

8.0 **JT SCHOOL COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 10:46 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, 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 for the sole purpose of adjourning.

At 10:46 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 - 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 for the sole purpose of adjourning.

At 10:55 p.m., the Committees were polled and voted to go out of Joint Executive Session.

NEXT MEETINGS

- December 20, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library
- January 8 (Tuesday), 7:30 pm, ABRSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library
- January 17, 7:00 pm. APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library
- January 26 (Saturday), 9:00 am – 2:00 pm Joint SC Budget Presentations, RJGJHS Library

The Joint School Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of documents used: see agenda