

**JOINT ACTON PUBLIC (APSC) and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL (ABRSC)
and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH TRANSITIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABTSC)
MEETINGS Minutes** (approved 12/12/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 5, 2013
7:00 p.m. Joint APSC/ABRSC/ABTSC

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan (7:10), Kristina Rychlik
Members Absent: Paul Murphy
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional and Acton Public School Committees were called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Maria Neyland and Dennis Bruce, respective Chairs.

1. Chairmen’s Introduction

2. Statement of Warrant and Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the 11/7/13 meeting (APS, ABRSC, ABTSC) were approved by the three Committees as amended. The minutes of the 10/3/13 and 11/21/13 meetings (APS, ABRSC, ABTSC) will be voted at the next meeting.

APS Warrant #201411 dated 11/26/13 in the amount of \$75,144.25 was signed by the Chair and circulated for signatures. AB Warrant #14-010 dated 11/14/13 in the amount of \$1,903,962.66 and warrant #14-011 dated 11/27/13 in the amount of \$1,867,776.43 were signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

3. Public Participation - none

4. Student Enrollment Projections

Peter and Mary Ann Ashton, from Innovation and Information Consultants, Inc. presented the annual projections. Peter noted that it was exciting to talk about enrollment as one K-12 region for the first time. Enrollment continues to decline with a net overall decline of 84 students or -1.7% (K-12) this year. Last year the Ashtons *correctly* predicted this year’s enrollment at 5571 students. Enrollment is expected to decline for the next 6 years at the elementary level and for the foreseeable future at grades 7 – 12. Total region enrollment declines through 2023, then starts to increase again. This is due in part to a decline in births and new construction. Regional elementary enrollment drops by about 400 students between now and 2020; then increases back to almost today’s level by 2025. JHS/SHS both continue to drop; total decline is 700 students between now and 2025. Acton’s share of total regional enrollment continues to increase until 2021, then Boxborough’s share slowly increases but remains at about 15% by 2025. The Ashtons were thanked for their extremely valuable and accurate data again this year.

It was noted that the colors on slide 3 should be reversed. Blue means under predicted, and red means over predicted.

5. FY15 Transportation

Dr. Mills said that JD Head has done a lot of work looking into a one tier transportation system for our elementary schools but the results are not turning out the way we had hoped. FUTURES Ed last year suggested that more money be spent on infrastructure for transportation at the current level. For these reasons, Dr. Mills stated that adding to the

system and not increasing funding is not the right thing to do at this time. He advocated for keeping 2 tiers as busing is done now for next year and then reexamine the one tier issue to see if it is feasible in a year or two. JD agrees and is not comfortable advocating for one tier right now due to the many unknowns about next year. He stated that they do know that 4000 students will be looking for a ride to school on September 3rd and they have to be ready.

The Administration's greatest concern is staffing a one tier system knowing that 13 – 17 additional drivers would need to be hired. Now that JD has run the proposed routes, other potential safety issues have come up. Operational support is also a concern. JD recommends Option 2 for next year because it is the most likely to be cost effective and gives the District the most flexibility. It means purchasing 7 buses and hiring 7 new drivers to incorporate the Blanchard School students. This would be a first step toward moving toward a one tier system.

Kristina Rychlik expressed concern about the current state of operational support for our transportation services. She mentioned buses being parked on donated land and that the maintenance shed is not large enough for work to be done in. JD said that LMI has donated their space to the schools for a very long time for the buses. The blue maintenance shed is shared by the grounds crew, diesel mechanic and bus mechanics. Even though only half a bus can fit in the shed at a time, 90% of the problems happen and are fixed on the road. JD acknowledged that with some of the services that Acton families are offered, including bus passes (of which 99% are honored), it is hard to go out to bid and find an operation willing to take it on. The difference between an in house service and a contracted service is that we can offer what our families are asking for.

Maria Neyland asked JD to provide the information on outsourcing the entire operation over the next year. JD will do this, but the last time he did, no company would do the whole operation. He reminded the Committee that these are for profit companies. School Choice also makes it complicated because of the added routes. The bus passes are a risk because they create room for error when a child's routine changes and sometimes a parent cannot be reached.

6. ABTSC Blanchard School Principal Search Update

Marie Altieri reported that four finalists have been named. Parents are invited to the open sessions next week with each candidate. A final decision is expected by the winter break.

7. ABTSC Superintendent Search Update

Brigid Bieber reported that the Search Committee is meeting tomorrow night.

8. ABTSC FY15 Budget

Don Aicardi gave an excellent explanation of the new Table 6 to be used for the K-12 ABRSD FY15 Budget process. Some of the numbers used are very preliminary and some are just for illustration purposes at this point. More details will be provided at the next School Committee meeting.

9. ABTSC PreK – 12 Regionalization

Dr. Mills reported that the Transitional Administrative Team Weekly Meetings continue to be very productive. They assume level service and no cuts. They are carefully discussing how the combining of Acton and Boxborough's resources will go. The Blanchard staff just joined abschools.org. Blanchard Kindergarten teachers joined Deb Bookis' grade level meeting and they said that they really enjoyed being part of a larger group of teachers for that discussion.

10. Elementary Class Size

(FIRST READ of revised policy File: IIBA at 12/12/13 meeting?)

1. Class Size Policy Options
2. Current Acton and Boxborough policies
3. Study Material from Boxborough School Committee presentation on 3/10/11 (posted with 11/7/13 School Committee meeting materials)
4. Class Size financial estimates (Section Planning)

After a long discussion at the previous meeting the School Committee was asked to give direction to the policy subcommittee so a First Reading could be done on a revised Class Size policy (incorporating Acton and Boxborough's elementary classes) next week. Implementing Acton's current policy would call for 123 sections while Boxborough's policy would call for 125 sections. Affordable class sizes are required. Dr. Mills recommended option 3 with 123 sections. Committee members discussed the need to set policy that is educationally sound but there were various opinions about whether budgetary concerns should be considered. The Administration's recommendation was also a consideration. The Committee agreed that they should spend time at the Summer Workshop discussing Class Size for Junior High and High School classes. (The current policy only covers K-6 classes.)

Several members spoke strongly in favor of option 2 (125 sections next year, but increasingly more sections in future years than option 3) but agreed to go with option 3 as long as the Committee returns to the discussion in the summer and considers the full gamut of class sizes. One member asked that the summer agenda item include diversity, sped/ell, and the composition of the classes by school.

Several members felt making large decisions like this in the infancy of regionalization was not prudent. Others saw this policy revision as the chance to "set goals for what is right for our students". After reviewing the background information, Kristina Rychlik said that the focus was on mitigating the effects of large class sizes. Teacher Karen Sonner was asked to speak about what it really means for the teacher and the students when class sizes are smaller. Karen said there is a big difference between 20 and 22 students because it means more time individually with each child. She also noted that in the past few years, the needs of the students have increased a lot. Maria Neyland spoke strongly that now is the time to set the priority for the kids. She said that while Option 2 has the research behind it, at the same time, the District is not going to be able to achieve it every year due to budget. She advocated for setting the priority and the policy for smaller class sizes.

Although not in agreement, the majority of the Committee felt the policy subcommittee should write a proposed policy around option 3 for a First Reading on 12/12/13.

11. Recommendation to Approve 2014-2015 All-Day Kindergarten Tuition – VOTE –

Dr. Mills reported that after much discussion, it is recommended that the difference between the two towns' All-Day Kindergarten tuition rates be split and the FY15 rate be set at \$4000. Erin Bettez noted that costs will be covered at this lower rate for Acton, but the financial assistance that will be needed is unknown every year. Acton has 7 All-Day K classrooms with about 145 kids. Boxborough has about 33 children, so 175 total students next year would be a projection.

ABTSC VOTE:

Kim McOsker moved, Kristina Rychlik seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the change in ADK tuition for next year as proposed.

12. Lower Fields Report

Erin Bettez reported that the Lower Fields have generated \$222,034 for FY13 and \$237,357 for FY14 to date. Both fields are nearly fully booked Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. A wish list includes a grooming machine that would be paid for after 3 times of use, lighting for the new rear parking lot, and fence pockets to “park” nets. Dennis reported that this has been a wonderful project and he is there all the time with his kids. The back parking lot needs a light for safety and it needs to be lined. Walking from the back lot is very dangerous right now. A yellow line is needed for where the cars should stay. Field 17 has woods half way then woods, consideration should be given to extending the net across there because if the ball goes over it the kids will get cut. He agrees with the pockets for nets. Erin said that connecting all of the parking lots with lighting is being discussed. Signage is needed right away for the handicap parking spots because they are not being used appropriately.

13. APS/ABRSC/ABTSC Policy Update

1. Prohibition of Harassment (Combining Files: ACAB, JBA, GBA) revision with form – **SECOND READING – VOTE**

ABTSC VOTE:

Brigid Bieber moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Prohibition of Harassment policy revision as proposed.

ABRSC VOTE:

Mary Brolin move, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Prohibition of Harassment policy revision as proposed.

APSC VOTE:

Deanne O’Sullivan moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Prohibition of Harassment policy revision as proposed.

2. ABTSC/APSC/ABRSC Policies - Consent Agenda #2 – **FIRST READING** – *Maria Neyland* (incorporating Blanchard policies with APS/ABRSD, see separately posted document)
 - i. Section B: School Board Governance and Operations (*selected policies*)
 - ii. Section C: General School Administration (*selected policies*)

Dennis Bruce asked if policy ADC – Smoking on School Premises includes electronic cigarettes and could they be considered a tobacco product because they contain nicotine. The policy subcommittee will review this question.

14. School Committee Member Reports

1. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – Brigid gave a brief update.
2. Acton Board of Selectmen – Katie Green reported that the Selectmen are closing the warrant at their next meeting.
3. Boxborough Board of Selectmen – Maria reported that the Selectmen discussed the new Minuteman School Agreement and feel the Boxborough SC should give an opinion on it.

The three School Committees adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- **December 12, 7:00 p.m. APSC/ABRSC/ABTSC meeting** (replaces meeting on December 19) followed by Boxborough School Committee, Blanchard Library in Boxborough
- Tuesday, January 7, 7:00 p.m. ABRSD/ABTSC meeting, Junior High Library
- Thursday, January 16, 7:30 p.m. APSC meeting, Junior High Library
- Saturday, January 25, 9:00 a.m. Public Interviews of Superintendent Finalists, Junior High Library
- Saturday, February 1, 9:00 a.m. ABRSD PreK- 12 BUDGET MEETING, Junior High Library

Respectfully submitted, Beth Petr
List of Documents Used: see agenda