

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 3/19/15)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

February 5, 2015
6:30 p.m. Executive Session
7:00 p.m. Open FY16 Budget Hearing
Followed by ABRSC Open Business Meeting

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik
Members Absent: Paul Murphy
Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Mary Emmons, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairwoman Kristina Rychlik.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 6:30 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to enter Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining, Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA)

(YES – Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, Krishnamurthy, Minkin, Neville, Neyland, O'Sullivan, Rychlik)

Kristina Rychlik stated that an open meeting might have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board.

At 7:02 p.m., the ABRSC was polled to go out of Executive Session and returned to Open Meeting.

ABRSC FY16 OPEN BUDGET HEARING - 7:00 p.m.

Please see material posted for 1/31/15 meeting at <http://www.abschools.org/school-committee/meetings-agendas-packets-and-minutes>

1. Chairwoman's Introduction

Kristina Rychlik welcomed everyone to the annual Open Budget Hearing.

2. ABRSC FY16 Budget– Glenn Brand and Clare Jeannotte

1. FY16 Budget Presentation Slides (*taken from 1/31/15 meeting, brought to meeting*)
2. Planning for Possible FY16 Reductions Memo
3. Recommended Table of Assessments (Table 6)

Dr. Brand reviewed the FY16 budget priorities outlined at the 12/18/14 meeting. There is a commitment to meet the needs of all students, especially in light of a rapidly growing number of high needs students, including those receiving English Language Education (ELE), those on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), those receiving specialized services to support mental health needs and low income students. Although enrollment is decreasing, this does not necessarily mean a reduction in resource needs.

Dr. Brand reminded the Committee that the FY16 Preliminary Budget that was presented on Budget Saturday, included \$223,000 of personnel reductions including two teachers due to enrollment, one custodian, an energy advisor and other items. He presented for the first time, Level 1 possible cuts totaling \$264,000 and Level 2 possible cuts totaling \$200,200 totalling \$464, 200 for the Committee's consideration. In addition, cuts to the High School bleachers and Parker Damon Building cafeteria tables could total \$85,000. Emphasizing that he did not wish these cuts to be made, but if the Committee needed to lower the assessments, the Administration had identified these areas as possibilities.

3. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Update

1. Materials from 2/5/15 Meeting
2. Minutes from 1/15/15 meeting

At the meeting held that morning, the Town of Acton representatives were not comfortable with the current FY16 school budget proposal, stating that it is \$1.2 million off the Fincom's Point of View. They object to excess funding capacity being used to fund the budget. They believe there is \$450,000 problem for the school budget, emphasizing that future years are looking very difficult quickly per the 3 Board meeting held in the fall. Dennis Bruce stated that everyone at the ALG table, from Town, School and Fincom perspective are all trying to work together. He complimented Marie Altieri and Kristina Rychlik for leading this effort of getting everyone to cooperate. Members all agreed to go back and talk to their committees about coming up with a way to get to a specific number. Dennis concluded that there was "a lot of trust at the table this morning."

4. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Update

Brigid Bieber reported that Boxborough Town Meeting is not until May so they are earlier in the process than Acton is. Boxborough is considering whether they should stay part of Minuteman Tech.

5. Discussion and Deliberation

Kristina Rychlik asked for Boxborough's turnback history. Brigid Bieber said it was \$190,000 last year and \$200,000 the year before.

As requested on Budget Saturday, the possible reductions were reviewed and discussed by the Committee. Dr. Brand stated that it is a difficult discussion because to some degree most do impact the students, although there is an effort not to do that. The Administration has tried to stay as far as possible from the instructional core. Individuals who are affected by these possible cuts have been told about this presentation, which is also difficult.

Administrators each described how the possible cuts would affect their areas.

EdTech Director Amy Bisiewicz described that the cuts would slow down our wireless upgrade project, because it would be phased in over 2 years. Although we have 100% wireless coverage, capacity is an issue with over 25 access points and this yields performance trouble. She would wait until next summer on this issue. She would terminate two after warranty support agreements. This could mean some significant downtimes if services are down for students and staff. Further, in operational services, we have a contracted webmaster whose overall hours could be reduced requiring others to take on the responsibility of maintaining their section of the website. A new printer agreement with the current vendor will give a 10% discount on toner and parts.

Level 2 cuts would eliminate a desktop support position that is now vacant. We are below the desktop support recommendations already. 90 -100 help desk tickets exist every day in EdTech. Eliminating this support could mean more time waiting for solutions.

Facilities and Transportation Director, JD Head stated that the Capital Study could be done in phases - existing conditions first and then the rest the next year. The reduction of \$50,000 in the safety and security/lock down procedures would mean that the Administration Building would probably not be done right away.

Level 2 reductions would eliminate a crossing guard removing two duty locations that are not as busy as other locations. Campus support would be rotated to cover campus security. A full time person in the security office now would be replaced by rotating through other High School staff.. This loss of continuity is not ideal, but would probably be ok. Carpet replacement cycle would take longer.

ABRHS Principal JoAnn Campbell described the four potential staff cuts at the High School. The High School store supervisor would be reduced from full time to 19 hours, and an effort would be made to increase parent volunteers. The current supervisor works with students who work in the store, they will lose this continuity and may lose services like delivering items from parents. High School staff would absorb responsibilities such as the Work Study Coordinator and School-to-Work program. A restructuring of the SWAP program may be required. Other High Needs Programs have been bolstered so some of the kids in SWAP are being served in other ways now resulting in fewer students in SWAP, but the program is still needed. They will look at other creative ways to help these students get the credits they need, particularly at the end of their senior year.

Mark Hickey, Director of Music cited a reduction in musical instrument replacement. He has been able to patch things together to meet the kids' needs for many years, but many instruments are in constant repair.

Andrew Shen, RJGJHS Principal, said that assistants are not attending both professional days, just one. Assistant Athletic Director at the Junior High would be eliminated and his roles would be absorbed. This is mostly coordination of schedules, busing and transportation. Stipends for literacy based clubs would suffer. He noted that Deborah Bookis has been generous about helping to fund these within her curriculum budget in the past (examples: Media club, literary magazine).

Glenn Brand reviewed the turnback history stating that it speaks volumes about what is happening now. He reminded the Committee that 80% of the school budget is people, making this very difficult work. He said that lengthy dialogue had taken place with many people to get to these lists.

Kristina Rychlik asked the Committee for their thoughts on the possible cut lists.

Brigid Bieber is in favor of the budget voted last Saturday, but she appreciates when towns have financial issues that need to be considered. That said, her job is to advocate for students, that is why she was elected. She really appreciated everyone speaking about what the cuts mean. All of these changes affect students, reallocating staff from Blanchard to bolster the Acton schools, she understands why but it affects students. Custodians being cut affects kids and carpet that is 20 years old with many young children sitting on them every day, affects kids. EdTech delays will affect students, as will the Capital Study – penny wise, pound foolish. Band instruments for kids who cannot afford their own, date back to 1960. Appointments with High School counselors will be harder to get with a cut to School to Work staff, crossing guards being cut, staff taking on JH athletic director tasks... it all affects kids. She emphasized that these things all matter and the School Committee needs to be very thoughtful about these decisions.

Mike Coppolino described the district as “a big business”. He is inclined to defer to the Superintendent and Administration to make these decisions. He urged that the two items below the line be considered (bleachers and cafeteria tables) and asked whether Community Education could possibly pick up some of those costs.

Mary Brolin stated that she supports the whole budget even though she was not there to vote on Saturday. Referring to the superintendent's memo, she asked if it was true that Comm Ed could contribute \$85,000 toward items like bleachers. Erin Bettez replied that it is difficult to know how much Comm Ed will have to contribute to capital items. Glenn Brand will explore this further.

Dennis Bruce asked Amy Bisiewicz about the possible cuts in her area and the delays they may cause students and staff. He suggested that she might consider outsourcing desktop support. He asked Mark Hickey about the instruments. Mark recognized ABSAF as a group that has helped tremendously every year to fill in funding gaps. Regarding timing of the Facilities Study, JD Head responded that he could be prepared to solicit proposals in June, have the summer to access the facilities and hopefully feed into FY17 budget process with recommendations. He stated that the roof of the High School is a particularly big asset to maintain.

Deanne O'Sullivan is concerned about the lost learning time with the technology reduction, loss of assistants for special education students, and also safety/security issues. If cuts are implemented, she wants to document the lost learning time and other impacts for the next budget cycle. For example, how much time technology is down.

Kristina Rychlik stated that we are behind other districts in 1:1 initiatives and EdTech. We are already not doing everything we should be doing in ELL and English instruction. Many of these cuts will transfer responsibility to already overworked staff, or she asked if the community wants Principals scheduling athletic events. Crossing guards are needed especially since we encourage kids walking and biking to school.

Mary Brolin is nervous about some of the numbers including the Middlesex Retirement figure because there is a question about how staff is allocated. It may not be determined in the schools' favor, causing an even bigger financial hit.

Maria Neyland stated, "We are not even doing everything we should be doing for the students with the original budget. This will affect the kids." The Capital Plan is important to do with a million square feet of buildings in the District. The High School is eleven years old and will start having needs. She was not sure she could support the cuts and does not want to vote until some of the significant questions are answered.

Dennis Bruce stated that he voted against the budget on Saturday because it was a big increase over last year, and there had been a big increase the previous year. We are voting how much to increase the budget again. He appreciates the individual line items because it makes it very clear. Mary Brolin argued that all of the increases are OPEB, Middlesex Retirement, Health insurance, special education tuition and transportation. She stated that any cut is a cut in service because none of this is adding services – it is all required.

Amy Krishnamurthy was not happy with any of the cuts. She thought Saturday's budget was bare bones. Kristina Rychlik explained that the Committee didn't have to vote. Saturday was a bottom line budget number vote. The next vote will be for the revenue sources and assessment. With so many things up in the air right now, Kristina suggested that the Committee needed more time to consider the options.

Brigid Bieber understood that there are fiscal issues in both towns, but she did not want to vote on cuts at this meeting. The towns need to understand what the Committee is doing, including voting on the budget with clear revenue sources.

Recommendation to Approve FY16 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Budget and Assessments – VOTE

Brigid Bieber moved:

“that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 be set at \$80,197,455 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 \$53,540,719 Boxborough \$11,198,103, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$14,393,376, offset by Choice and Charter Assessments of \$546,513, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$26,761, Anticipated Regional Bonus Aid in the amount of \$111,200, Anticipated Chapter 71, Section 16C Transportation Aid, in the amount of \$1,266,283, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$200,000, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$7,526.”

Maria Neyland seconded the motion.

Dennis Bruce stated that looking at the level 1 and 2 proposed cuts, based on ALG that morning, \$2.6 million in reserves would still be being used just to fund the Town of Acton’s budget which includes the school assessment. He felt that is too much money and said that it is 25% of the reserves of town of Acton even if level 1 and 2 cuts are included. Dennis made a second point that as painful as the cuts would be, what would be even more painful would be if the budget did not pass at Acton Town Meeting.

The Committee VOTED to approve the motion as read.

(YES: Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, Minkin, Neville, Neyland, O’Sullivan, Rychlik

NO: Coppolino, Bruce)

BUDGET HEARING ADJOURNED and OPEN BUSINESS MEETING BEGAN (9:05 p.m.)

6. Statement of Warrant

1. Warrant #15-016 dated 2/5/15 in the amount of \$2,832,451.84 was signed by the School Committee members.
2. Minutes of School Committee Budget Saturday Meeting on 1/31/15 (*next meeting*)

7. Public Participation - none

8. Professional Learning Day 1/16/15 Update

Deborah Bookis reported on a very successful first PreK- Grade 8 Day for Professional Learning. Lester Laminack was the speaker. Committee members were impressed by the complete process as explained by Deborah, and how many teachers offered to do mini workshops.

9. Subcommittee Updates

1. **Budget** – Kristina Rychlik reported on the meetings held 1/29/15 and 2/5/15. The Subcommittee briefly discussed possibly bonding OPEB. First step would be to ask Clare to speak with the Treasurer and our OPEB advisor. The Committee will review fee structures and revolving accounts.
2. **Regional Financial Oversight** – Michael Coppolino reported on the meeting held on 1/30/15. They continue to track savings due to regionalization and plan to present to

School Committee in March 19. They will meet prior to Acton Town Meeting regarding the statement that they will make.

10. School Committee Member Reports

1. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)– *Mary Brolin*
Rates are expected to be voted at the end of February.
2. Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) Task Force– *Dennis Bruce*
This group will meet in a month or so. Dennis will bring up bonding OPEB again. It is different now that we are a Region. This will be an important meeting. Dennis will be leaving the Committee so he urged members to consider taking his place on this subcommittee.
3. Acton Finance Committee – *Dennis Bruce*
Meeting was cancelled last week due to snow.
4. Acton Board of Selectmen - *Paul Murphy*
BOS was meeting the same night due to snow on Monday.
5. Acton-Boxborough SpedPAC – *Paul Murphy*
 - i. Update: Population Trends of High Needs Students re Chapter 70 Funding
 - ii. Foundation Budget Review Commission Public Hearing: 1/24/15 in Bolton –
This meeting was cancelled due to bad weather.
6. Boxborough Board of Selectmen – *Brigid Bieber*
BOS approved the new Fiber Cable Agreement with the Region.
7. Joint PTO/PTSO/PTF Co-Chairs – *Deanne O’Sullivan*
Next meeting is February 25th.

11. Response to 9C Cuts in Regional Transportation – *Kristina Rychlik*

12. Acton and Boxborough Local Elections – *Kristina Rychlik*

Deanne O’Sullivan will run again. Dennis Bruce will not run again.

13. Superintendent’s Report – *Glenn Brand*

1. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Update
Glenn Brand reported that in the fall, some schools began to push back on the NEASC because they felt their review process is inflexible, the expense of accreditation process is not warranted, and they question the relevance of the accreditation. A number of districts started to pressure NEASC, including AB and many communities around us. A letter was co-signed and distributed widely. Because ABRSD is almost up for their 5 year progress report, Glenn will propose at the next meeting for School Committee to continue to support the other districts who are withholding any activities.

17. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Dennis Bruce stated that a number of people were very impressed with last Saturday’s FY16 Budget presentations, describing them as very transparent and very clear. He commended everyone for all of the work that went into that day.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda