

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
WORKSHOP MINUTES (approved 9/4/14)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

July 24, 2014

6:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. School Committee Workshop

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppelino, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan (6:35 p.m.), Kristina Rychlik

Members Absent: none

Others: Glenn Brand, Beth Petr

Chairperson Kristina Rychlik called the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee to order at 6:30 p.m.

She thanked the Acton Water District, Green Acton and the Acton Town Clerk's office for the water bottles for each committee member. Plastic water bottles will no longer be provided at meetings in an effort to be more "green". For more info, see www.ActonWater.com

1. **Chairman's Introduction**

School Committee members shared their answers to "Why did you join the School Committee? What do you consider your role to be? What is one thing we do not know about you?" Everyone enjoyed getting to know each other a little better as they began the school year as the "new" Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee for grades PreK-12.

2. **Statement of Warrant and Minutes from Last Year's Workshop**

The following warrants were signed by the School Committee:

- APS warrant #201427B dated 6/30/14 in the amount of \$291,843.44 and #201502 dated 7/22/14 in the amount of \$982.00.
- ABRSC warrant #14-025 dated 6/12/14 in the amount of \$1,867,536.58, #14-026 dated 6/26/14 in the amount of \$1,960,132.07, #14-026A dated 6/19/14 in the amount of \$2,470,768.00, #14-027 dated 6/30/14 in the amount of \$450,087.07, #14-027A dated 6/26/14 in the amount of \$46,143.40. and #14-028 dated 6/30/14 in the amount of \$54,673.85 for FY14.
- ABRSC warrant #15-001 dated 7/10/14 in the amount of \$611,136.33, #15-001A dated 7/1/14 in the amount of 2,343,405.50 and #15-002 dated 7/24/14 in the amount of \$1,824,967.32 for FY15.

3. **Recommendation to approve changes to Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Handbook for FY15 – VOTE**

(Handbook is found at <http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/pdf/files/handbook.pdf>)

Dean Maurin O'Grady returned to the School Committee for a second reading of the handbook changes. A member commented on the two year requirement for math, when the vast majority of students take more math classes. This has been brought up at School Committee before and the reason for having only two years is that these are minimum requirements and for some students with a disability or temporary illness (such as a concussion) this requirement means they are able to graduate without "lowering the bar". Mike Coppelino stated that he is not in favor of in-school suspensions, or deducting points for excessive tardiness, even if they are unexcused.

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

VOTED: to approve the changes as proposed to the ABRHS Handbook for FY15

4. Superintendent's Entry Plan

Mr. Brand reviewed his Entry Plan as posted in the packet. He will present back to School Committee in midwinter. He looks forward to his "Listen and Learn" meetings with many members of the Acton and Boxborough communities. Students are an important part of the mix for him, particularly at the Junior High and High School age. He plans to get into the classrooms often and be visible. Mr. Brand asked if there are any other groups that he should meet with or other feedback that would be valuable. The survey mentioned in his Plan is currently on hold. It may be paired with another effort so people are not bombarded with multiple survey requests.

5. Update on Superintendent's Induction Program on 7/15/14

Mr. Brand outlined the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP), that he is participating in. This three year program is sponsored by Mass Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the DESE.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE ANNUAL WORKSHOP

6. School Committee Policy, Operations, and Organizations

6.1. School Committee self-evaluation discussion – *Kristina Rychlik*

Committee members were sent self-evaluations to consider before coming to the meeting. Topics included: Governance, Operations, Member Relations, Committee/Superintendent Relations, Strategic Planning and Fiscal Management, Community Relations and Conduct of Meetings.

Several members felt community relations was a weak area for the School Committee. It was suggested that a Public Relations Plan (PR Plan) be developed. The Committee wondered if they had a mission statement. One member stated that more facetime from Committee members is needed in the schools. It was suggested that policies could be highlighted in a PR plan to help educate families. Mr. Brand stated that it is his job to be sure his staff knows the policies. Monthly School Committee updates used to be sent to the school newsletters, but it takes someone willing to write them and ensure accuracy.

Self-evaluation sheets were collected for the file if members brought them to the meeting.

6.2. Meeting Management

6.2.1. Public participation

Possible new policy: Public Participation at School Committee Meetings

The Committee discussed Kristina Rychlik's proposed draft policy prior to sending it to the policy subcommittee. Several members felt three to five minutes per person was more appropriate than two. Mike Coppelino stated that it is School Committee's job to be available to the public. Paul Murphy agreed except in situations where there are many people in the audience. Kristina suggested adding "If you have something new to add" to the time limit. It was agreed that a policy should be kept simple and that the Chair should be given a heads up prior to the meeting.

Bill Guthlein spoke from the audience and urged that discretion be given to the Chairperson on how to manage the meeting. Kristina pointed out that the guidelines are for the public commenting on items that are on, and not on, the agenda. Some districts call it public comment, and there is no interaction after the comment (Brookline). AB has not operated that way. Dennis Bruce advocated for speakers being allowed to

question the Committee on a topic at the discretion of the Chair. Mary Brolin did not like the two minute limit and does like the back and forth with a speaker. She questioned if the time should be different for agenda and non-agenda items.

6.2.2. Working together/communications

Mr. Brand read the statement found in the packet. Kristina asked members who miss a meeting to please watch it on tv, then give her a call to catch up if needed.

It was agreed that there should be no surprises from either direction.

6.2.3. Which items are given First and Second Readings before voting?

Policy changes and the School Calendar receive two readings for public input. The Committee also would like two readings on the High School handbook. Often items that require a vote get two readings.

6.2.4. Public email response protocol

When an email is sent to ABRSC@abschools.org, either the Chair, Glenn Brand or Beth Petr will respond. The Committee will be cc'd on a response, unless it is just a "thank you". Maria Neyland pointed out that care is needed for some emails that are sent due to confidentiality or the appearance of "discussing business" outside of an open meeting. A member asked that something be written explaining how emails to the School Committee are handled. Maria will have the policy subcommittee look at this.

6.3. Policy Subcommittee annual review and plan for next year

Maria reported that approximately 50 policies still need to be reviewed from the 200 or so that were approved over the course of last year. Policy subcommittee will meet soon. It was suggested that only a couple of policies be considered at a time.

6.4. Meeting Set Up

The Committee discussed if the meeting set up should be changed given the addition of two more members. It was agreed that the student reps would be asked to sit in the front row, instead of at the table due to how crowded the tables are. Everyone needs to remember to speak directly into the microphones. Most members appreciated having the packet posted on Friday night so they could read it over the weekend.

7. School Operations

7.1. Class Size Overall including Jr High and High School

7.1.1. Acton and Boxborough Class Size Policies IIBA and IK

7.1.2. Background information

Kristina began by stating that she has a broader perspective on the class size issues than she had when it first came up in the spring. Her real issue was not the actual policy but how it was being addressed related to the budget that was being finalized at the same time. She asked if the issue at the High School is a class size issue, or a chair issue, or a chair allocation issue. The Committee was asked if they needed a new policy task force on class size or a HS/JH policy. Current policy applies to elementary schools only. Deanne O'Sullivan stated the PTO co-chairs felt class size at the High School is an issue.

After lengthy discussion, it was agreed that administrators and staff should be asked for input before anything else is done. There was not a need for a new task force to gather information, as that has already been done. Mr. Brand was asked to consult with his staff and make a recommendation to the School Committee at a future meeting. One member stated that the policy guidelines may not "trip" a new class, but they do trigger a discussion. It is a statement of values.

7.2. Switching the elementary and Jr High/High School start times/one-tier busing

Deanne O'Sullivan spoke to people in Duxbury who have elementary schools on the early schedule and older students on the later schedule, and it has worked well for them. The Committee discussed how this could affect students' mental health and abilities. Amy Krishnamurthy feels strongly about this as well. Kristina pointed out that Marie Altieri did her masters' thesis on this topic and the key is kids getting enough sleep. There are other things that can be done to address this need for sleep. Mike Coppolino felt that it is time to address this issue now that there is data. He stated that the health and safety of the students takes top priority and it should not take years of study. Maya Minkin agreed and urged the Committee to give this their full consideration and then talk about one tier busing with JD Head.

JoAnn Campbell and Andrew Shen will be asked for input and invited to report to School Committee so the Committee can decide how to move forward. Maria Neyland reminded members of the contract implications involved, the need to study it in detail before possible implementation, and the buy in that would be essential from the community.

Mr. Brand noted that a competing issue is one tier busing. He said that it appears that one tier busing would go into effect in September 2015. If so, JD and the administration need to know asap so they can prepare for the FY16 budget plan. The one tier busing is very closely linked to the school start times. The Committee realizes that there is a cost to one tier busing. Kristina concluded that the two immediate tasks are to get a financial estimate from JD and then to hear the High School and Jr High Administrators' opinions so the School Committee can discuss and decide.

7.2.1. Homework Policy, File: IKB

The Administration has been getting complaints about how much homework is being given at the Jr High. Based on school choice, every school has their own policy and the Committee was asked if they think one policy is needed. The Committee had concerns about K-12 homework and this came up when combining the Acton and Boxborough policies. One member stated that you cannot have a policy for everything and that the current policy IKB is general enough. The Committee agreed that the policy subcommittee could propose a general policy and the Administration could do procedures.

7.3. Curriculum Adoption Policy, File: IGD

Some of the members were not familiar with this policy. It appears to state that the Committee needs reports on new courses and major curriculum changes for their review only. Members remembered the discussions about adding the arts requirement, foreign language, and the 990 required hours issues. Mr. Brand suggested that approving the Program of Studies is good practice and beyond approving graduation requirements. He stated that instruction (such as electronic vs paper methods) is different from curriculum (such as a math program). Several members advocated for open communication and not being the last to know about changes going on in the schools.

7.4. Demographic Values Study

7.4.1. Executive Summary (of selected results presented to School Committee 1/28/10)

<http://www.ab.mec.edu/pdffiles/values-interest/Educational%20Values%20Exec%20Summary.pdf>

7.4.2. Presentation by Staff <http://www.ab.mec.edu/pdffiles/values-interest/Educational%20Values%20and%20Interest%20Presentation.pdf>

7.4.3. Executive Summary of Boston College Analysis, 3/28/14

Boston College has agreed to do another survey for the District if we would like them to.

After much discussion of the pros and cons, and what the goal would be, Kristina concluded that there did not appear to be a compelling reason to do another survey this year. Paul Murphy expressed his concern about some of the issues that the analysis brought out. Maya Minkin has heard from parents with concerns around these issues – that some of our schools’ student demographics do not mirror our community. The Committee questioned whether this is something that they should, or even could, do anything about, particularly with the emphasis on open enrollment. Mr. Brand expects to hear more about this during his community conversations and that could drive how they move forward. His work in Toronto involved similar topics. Kristina confirmed that a survey is not a focus for the School Committee next year.

7.5. School Committee members connecting with the schools

The Committee discussed how members can make better connections. Members can tour the schools and attend the Open Houses. School Committee packets will include any appropriate invitations and members can report back if they attend. The Committee may consider reinstating liaisons to the individual schools. Mr. Brand will ask the Principals if they like this idea. The Committee considered whether to include Education Reports in their meetings again. Having the open invitations to schools’ events could address some of this. The School Improvement Plans will be included in September’s FYI.

8. **Acton and Boxborough Political Relationship Building**

8.1. Acton Finance Committee’s suggestion of joint meetings of all boards for capital and long range planning

The Committee discussed the Acton Finance Committee’s invitation to the School Committee and Acton Board of Selectmen to a joint meeting to get to know each other, and begin talking about long term planning. Mary Brolin stressed that any material that goes to any committee must be seen and discussed by the School Committee first. She reminded the Committee that this was an issue on Budget Saturday. It was also emphasized that the Committee is a regional School Committee and everyone needs to be very careful about including both town officials during budget discussions. It was suggested that Boxborough officials be asked if they would like to do the same type of gathering. Dennis Bruce will let Steve Noone know that the whole ABRSC would like to be invited.

9. **2014-2015 Subcommittee Members**

The Committee discussed the list and will vote on it at their meeting on August 4.

10. **Next Steps and Wrap Up**

Given the late hour, Kristina did a quick wrap up and noted that input is needed from the administration on several different topics before the Committee can proceed.

The School Committee adjourned at 11:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda

Next Meetings:

ABRSC, Monday, August 4, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library
ABRSC, Thursday, September 4, 7:30 p.m. in the Junior High Library