

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 1/9/15)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 18, 2014
7:00 p.m.

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

Chair Kristina Rychlik called the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. Chairman’s Introduction

Student Leaders Pamela Yan, Jenny Qiu, Vennela Pandaraboyina, and Tara Jawahar from the ABRHS *Spectrum* newspaper, shared their work covering events in the community and the world. Seven hundred copies are made for each issue. They plan to go completely online soon. Instead of 5 issues per year, they would like to do daily, weekly or monthly updates on school events. They have 30-40 writers and 20 students that copyedit and do layout.

2. Statement of Warrant and Approval of Minutes

The minutes of School Committee Meetings on 12/4/14 and 11/20/14 were approved. ABRSC warrant #15-012 dated 12/11/14 in the amount of \$3,067,612.42 was signed by the members.

3. Public Participation - none

4. Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program Presentation and Recommendation to Approve FY16 Tuition – VOTE

Early Childhood Coordinator/Preschool Director Joe Gibowicz provided an overview of this integrated program and the services it provides for our students who are developing typically as well as those who have developmental delays. Currently, 124 children are in the program. Some differences need to be addressed to align the Acton and Boxborough programs involving tuition and school hours. This year, the first year of regionalization, it was decided not to make many changes, however as a regional district, it is important to have the same programs and access at both sites. Also all of the District’s preschool teachers are covered by the same contract and should work the same number of hours.

The following tuition rates were proposed for the FY16 Early Childhood Program*:

Program	FY '14	FY '15	FY '16
Acton Full Day	\$6830	\$6830	
Acton Half Day	\$3530	\$3530	
Boxborough	\$5000	\$5000	
A-B Full Day			\$6830*
A-B Half Day			\$3530*

Joe noted that the Boxborough site increase in tuition also reflects an increased time in learning. Like tuition, for this first year of regionalization, no changes were made to the hours of the program at either site (Acton or Boxborough) for FY15. In an effort to provide consistency of programming, hours for next year will be:

All Day from 9:00 – 3:10 (Acton and Boxborough sites)

Half Day from 9:00 – 11:35 and another session from 12:35 – 3:10 (Acton and Boxborough sites)
Previously, Boxborough's program offered 5 hour sessions from 9:00 – 2:00.

With many members of the public in attendance, the Committee questioned Joe, Mary Emmons and Glenn Brand about how and why this change to hours was decided on. All agreed the focus should be on what is best for serving the students. Joe described a number of meetings and public forums held with Boxborough's Principal/Superintendent, Dr. Bates, and some of his staff to talk about what unifying the District would mean and how programs would need to be aligned. Joe stated that every year the demand for Early Childhood Program services is different and very difficult to predict. He noted that all families who are currently enrolled in full day would be guaranteed full day next year if they choose.

Dennis Bruce questioned why the tuition has been the same for 3 years, assuming that the cost to deliver the services must have increased. Glenn Brand said that the program is fee-based but special education costs are not considered tuition because they are mandated services for students with identified needs. Marie Altieri explained that an analysis was done last year and the year before of local preschool tuitions. Based on that information, and that we were in transition due to regionalization, it was decided not to change the tuition.

Brigid Bieber noted that even with changing the hours, a jump in tuition of about 36% for Boxborough families is a big jump.

Kathleen Neville stated that her daughter is in her first year at the Blanchard program. She is concerned about how this decision was made and the change to the services provided to the students. She noted that Acton values diversity and to alter such a great program like Blanchard's because of regionalization is concerning to her.

Glenn Brand is sensitive to people feeling like Blanchard's programs are being aligned with Acton programs due to regionalization, but he asked that the School Committee vote on next year's tuition so the FY16 budgets can be prepared. Kristina thanked Joe for taking such a thoughtful approach meeting with Acton and Boxborough staff over the past 6 months.

Paul Murphy moved to approve the proposed tuition in the packet, and Deanne O'Sullivan seconded the motion.

A number of Boxborough parents spoke passionately in support of the program at Blanchard expressing concern and frustration about the tuition and timing decisions being made. Several comments were made that families most affected by these decisions have not had a chance to give input because they were unaware that changes were being considered.

The Committee discussed whether the vote could wait until their next meeting. Although tuition figures are needed for the FY16 budgets, and registration for these Fall programs begins in December (parents will want to know what they are signing up for), public feedback was important to the Committee as well.

Glenn Brand said that delaying the tuition vote is an option while feedback is solicited, but how the District wrestles with having one preschool program instead of two is part of regionalization.

Kristina Rychlik spoke against delaying the vote. She reminded the Committee that dedicated staff have worked hard to figure out the best way to meet the needs of our special education and regular education students and this is our staff's best recommendation. Maria Neyland emphasized that the vote is not on the program, but tuition. Feedback on the program goes to the Administration, not the Committee. She was struggling with the amount of the tuition increase and would feel better if tuition comparisons were provided. The recommended tuition is lower than what some local providers charge. Mary Brolin recommended further processing with the parents. She does not support the proposed tuition and would like to see a staged increase for the Blanchard program site.

It was the sense of the Committee to delay the tuition vote until January 8th.

Paul Murphy withdrew his motion and Deanne O'Sullivan seconded the withdrawal.

The Committee asked the Administration to gather more data regarding the program although it is not needed by the School Committee. Comparative tuitions for local programs will be provided at the January 8 meeting prior to the vote.

5. **All Day Kindergarten Presentation and Recommendation to Approve FY16 Tuition – VOTE**

Erin Bettez recommended that the FY16 All Day Kindergarten (ADK) tuition be set at \$4,300. There are currently 169 students across 9 ADK classes in the District. Future considerations include offering ADK to all students and having one full/one half day program at the Blanchard site. Erin was complimented on her clear, well organized presentation. A suggestion was made that credit card users absorb their fees for using a card.

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

VOTED: To set the All Day Kindergarten tuition at \$4,300 for the school year 2015 -2016.

6. **Regionalization Update** (*taken out of order*)

Blanchard Principal Dana Labb, Assistant Principal Dr. Karen Tower, and some of their staff presented on how regionalization has affected their school. Later in the year the other schools will present their perspectives. Dana described the 13 member Blanchard team that meets with the Superintendent every month. Eileen Barnett has taught art at Blanchard for the past 15 years. She enthusiastically described how regionalization has now made her part of the visual arts department at ABRSD and Diana Woodruff welcomes her to collaborative meetings of 15 colleagues every month. ABEA President Karen Sonner was thanked for reaching out to the Blanchard staff. Dana said that having a network of support with the other seven principals has been invaluable. When asked how the School Committee can help the Blanchard community with the transition, Dana replied that there are just a lot of little things that need to be addressed as time goes on. Dana was thanked for an excellent presentation.

7. **FY16 Budget Presentation #1 - *Setting the Stage***

Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte and Marie Altieri set the stage for the start of the FY15 Budget Presentations. They described the District's priorities, enrollment highlights and trends, budget assumptions and the appropriated budget and turnback history. Budget drivers include: OPEB, Middlesex Retirement, Heath Insurance, Salaries, Debt Service, Sped Transportation and Sped Tuition.

In response to a question, Clare said the 17% increase in Middlesex Retirement is a lot but the Board met recently and although the average increase was 6%, Clare spoke with someone who had a 25%

increase. Clare is looking into this to be sure the allocation of people is correct. She wonders if the estimate for FY15 with full regionalization was based on the right number of employees.

The Health Insurance Trust just voted to approve EGWHP for July 1 implementation which should provide some cost savings. The Committee asked what salary level new staff was budgeted for. Marie stated that for FY16 they are looking at Masters level 3. She is comfortable with that if the vacancy factor comes down.

Dennis Bruce encouraged the Administration to be as realistic as possible with the numbers as the budget process proceeds. He wants to, "Get it all out up front and not find things out later on." Clare said that regarding the budget process, she is trying to understand what has been done in the past, but mainly due to regionalization, it is challenging to get comparable numbers. Also with a brand new chart of accounts this year, it is hard to pull some numbers. She highlights more details in the packet documents than found in the slides. The Committee looks forward to the next budget presentation.

8. ABRSD Athletic Director Announcement and Search Process

Glenn Brand thanked Steve Desy for his 30 years of service to the District. Marie Altieri described the search process. Coaches and parents can email Marie by January 6th if they would like to be on the Search Committee. Steve is retiring on June 30, 2015.

9. Recommendation to Accept Donation from FOLF to ABRSD to offset bond costs related to Lower Fields per MOU – VOTE

Glenn Brand reminded the Committee that the MOU describes how this revenue is to be allocated. Mike Coppolino moved, Kathleen Neville seconded and it was

VOTED: to accept the \$25,000 donation as proposed.

10. Recommendation to Accept Donation from the Friends of the Acton Libraries to our 6 elementary schools, RJGJHS and ABRHS – VOTE

Mary Brolin moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the \$16,100 donation to the libraries as proposed.

11. Recommendation to Accept Donation from IBM to Conant School – VOTE

Mary Brolin moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the \$500 donation to Conant as proposed.

12. Subcommittee Updates

12.1. Outreach – Kathleen Neville

12.1.1. Draft ABRSC Mission Statement

Information was in today's Beacon regarding tonight's agenda.

The Committee was asked for comments on the proposed mission statement. Brigid suggested that it be called a statement of purpose because the District has a mission statement.

Mary Brolin moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the proposed statement of purpose.

12.2. Budget – Kristina Rychlik

12.2.1. Restating Table 6

This new subcommittee met on 12/10/14. Kristina reported that Dennis will be the chair.

They discussed making budget information more clear this year. Clare is considering how to restate Table 6 and break out some categories such as OPEB. She is going to try to draft this for a future ALG meeting.

12.3. Regionalization Financial Oversight

Mike Coppolino reported that they met an hour before the School Committee meeting. Next meeting is Tuesday, January 27th.

12.4. **Policy**

12.4.1. Special Education Parent Advisory Council, File: BDFB – **FIRST READ**

Maria Neyland reported that this draft revision was done with input from the SpedPAC's Nancy Sherburne. SpedPAC requested a policy about nine years ago because the PACs work could not be done without support from the Administration and there was no policy at that time. This revision adds the District Mission Statement and the sentence that it is the general goal of the District to foster relationships with parent/guardians which encourage cooperation between home and school. Procedures will be reviewed at a later date.

13. **School Committee Member Reports**

13.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Kristina Rychlik*

13.1.1. Draft Minutes of 11/20/14 meeting (revision)

13.1.2. Meeting materials for 12/11/14 meeting

Budget Timeline was presented to ALG. Cost savings items are requested by all participants.

13.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – *Brigid Bieber*

There is some interest in a combined Board meeting. Next meeting is Jan 28th.

13.3. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)– *Mary Brolin*

At the meeting this morning, Tess Summers was recognized for her work. An audit found some discrepancies and some issues have been identified and are being worked through. This will lead to improved practices. The audit report was approved as well as using EGWHIP for FY15.

13.4. Acton Finance Committee – *Kristina Rychlik*

A presentation was done by Clare and Glenn on the ABRSD FY14 closeout/FY15 update at the meeting on 12/9/14. There is concern about OPEB.

13.5. Acton Board of Selectmen - *Paul Murphy*

Middlesex Retirement issues were discussed. Paul went to a meeting about potential changes to the Chapter 70 formula in Somerset. Another will be held nearby in the future.

13.6. Acton-Boxborough SpedPAC – *Paul Murphy*

Update: Letter from ABRSC re Population Trends of High Needs Students

13.7. Boxborough Board of Selectmen – *Brigid Bieber*

Public hearing was held for the lease for the cable from Boxborough. The lease was signed by the BOS and the District must review and sign now.

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

14.1. Draft Letters to Gov. Patrick and Governor-elect Baker requesting Restoration of 9C Cuts in Regional Transportation from ABRSC

At the last meeting the School Committee agreed to do this letter. Kristina asked for final comments. She reviewed the delivery plan and aims to send it by winter break. Clare referred to the letter signed by the Legislators in the packet. MARS is also working hard on this issue, as well as MASC. The letter will be shared with them as well.

15. **Acton and Boxborough Local Elections**

Dennis Bruce and Deanne O'Sullivan's terms will be up in Acton. Last day to obtain nomination papers is Feb 6th. Brigid Bieber's term is up in Boxborough. Their deadline is March 30.

16. **Superintendent's Report**

The FY15 Interschool Council members are identified and the first meeting will be in January. The Kindergarten info night is January 13th. The registration information is on the website.

17. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

The Douglas School held their first Exhibition of Learning on 12/17/14 and it was very successful.

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda

NEXT MEETINGS:

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meetings, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library:
1/8/15 and 1/22/15

ABRSC FY16 Budget Saturday Presentations, 1/31/15 from 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library