

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Approved MINUTES

Auditorium
ABRSD Administration Building
15 Charter Road, Acton, MA

March 21, 2019
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Mary Brolin, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Paul Murphy, Angie Tso, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Maya Minkin
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Diane Baum.
2. **Chairman's Introduction**
Chairperson Diane Baum noted the dates for the Acton and Boxborough elections. Acton's race is contested. She also noted that Representative Jennifer Benson would speak earlier in the meeting tonight than originally scheduled.
3. **Public Participation - none**
4. **Student Rep Update**
Student Rep Betty Markman reported that Student Council elections were held today and in a few weeks Class officers will be elected.
5. **Statement of Warrant & Approval of Minutes**
Meeting Minutes of 2/13/19 were approved as amended, as moved by Paul Murphy and seconded by Amy Krishnamurthy. Minutes of 3/7/19 were approved as written, as moved by Amy Krishnamurthy and seconded by Adam Klein. The Chair read the warrants and the Committee reviewed and signed the documents. See listing.
6. **Superintendent's Update**
Mr. Light congratulated various student groups for their recent successes. He shared his experience at the Commissioner of Education's "Kairos" event. He and 50 other Superintendents were joined by students, teachers and education leaders from across the state. This was a result of the Commissioner's Entry Process and was notable for its focus on students and engaging them through authentic and 21st Century tasks.
7. **Presentations: School Improvement Plan Updates**
Luther Conant School Principal Damian Sugrue presented his School Improvement Plan and took questions and comments afterwards.
8. **Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) Annual Year End Report**
Dave Verdolino reported on the Annual Review done by Bartholomew for the period ending June 30, 2018 with a value at that time of \$4,009,609. A meeting of the Advisory Board was held on February 21, 2019. The Committee discussed the \$900,000 contribution that has been made each year for FY18, FY19 and planned for FY20. The actuaries' analysis shows that if a \$900,000 contribution is made every year, it will take until the end of the century to retire this liability. There are strategies that could bring that date closer, for instance if expenditures can be reduced. A member noted that as a nation some decisions should be made about limiting health care in some areas.

John Petersen spoke from the audience remarking that the town of Acton and the schools have taken different positions, but ultimately it all comes back to the taxpayers. Mary Brolin said that when the Districts fully regionalized, the Acton and Boxborough school districts had put significant money into the districts and that all went into the towns' funds. Acton Selectperson Katie Green added that the Town of Acton now includes an amount for OPEB when new staff are hired to try to avoid some of that continued growth.

9. **Kindergarten Registration Update**

Marie Altieri reported that enrollment came in far under the projections, which is opposite from previous years. 275 students enrolled with a projection of 342. Although 25-30 more students are expected, this is still a significant difference. The Committee questioned the enrollment projections and were told that NESDEC is the only service currently doing this work, now that the Ashtons have stopped. Kindergarten is the hardest level to project. Michael Bo questioned the accuracy of the projections and requested that the inaccuracies be fixed. It is notable that 229 families (81%) requested All Day Kindergarten (ADK). The lottery will be done next week. Blanchard will need a lottery due to many Acton families requesting it. Families' first choices will fit into all of the schools, except for Blanchard. Due to the home town guarantee, room must be saved for additional children that might move into Boxborough.

After much discussion with the principals, it has been decided to go ahead with hybrid Kindergarten at all schools. One half-day Kindergarten will still exist at Blanchard. If ~~and when~~ universal All Day Kindergarten is decided on, a multi-year funding strategy could be considered. A discussion will be brought to the School Committee in the fall. Principals have all talked to the Kindergarten teachers about the hybrid K and there are still details to decide. The important point is that this was the right decision for the students. There is a cost implication to this decision. Based on the numbers, there will be revenue from the ADK students, but there could be up to a \$100,000 gap to cover. If students move in and need scholarships, there will be funds for that.

A survey will go out to all Kindergarten families.

10. **Massachusetts School Foundation Budgeting**

Ginny Kremer gave an overview of the legislation and case law pertinent to School Foundation Budgeting. The Massachusetts Constitution, which preceded the US Constitution, mandated that education be provided for children. The Court has recognized that the Education Reform Act of 1993 goals have not been achieved yet and falls far short of actual education costs. What is currently taking place is another attempt to address these issues.

Dave Verdolino explained the Foundation Budget Review Commission's Recommendations dated October 30, 2015. These cover: health insurance, special education, English language learners, low income students, data collection specifically around funding usage, the need and value of preschool, and inflation including adjusting the statutory cap. "The Promise Act" works to implement these recommendations.

Representative Jennifer Benson was introduced and welcomed. Senator James Eldridge and Representative Tami Gouveia were invited but their schedules did not allow them to attend the meeting. A letter from Representative Gouveia in support of fully funding the PROMISE Act and CHERISH Act was read into the record.

Prior to being elected, Rep. Benson served on her local School Committee and was active in her schools before becoming a Representative in 2008. One of the first things she did was "a deep dive" into the Foundation Budget. She spoke about how hard it has been over the years to make serious budget cuts while trying to protect education funding. Chapter 70 is the biggest single line item in the budget that the elected officials have any funding choice over. She also noted that changing the formula means changing the local side of funding as well. She agrees that the formula needs to be changed. Health care and special education costs have all risen. More districts are bringing students home for their education and that requires financial

support. She stated that everyone in the legislature knows there is significant need. They are on track to fully fund this by 2024 at the rate they are going. In order to fund it right away, as is being requested, new revenue would be required.

School Committee Discussion:

A member referenced a prior comment that the Commission agreed about needs but often wanted to study things and ran out of time. Members talked about how closing the achievement gap requires that programs be created. Time is needed to get the right interventions and figure out what they will cost. Other legislators want to commit money and let others plan the programs later. Current interventions have not worked since the achievement gap has not been closed. Rep Benson stated that more targeted interventions are needed but the House is nervous about putting money into efforts that they cannot measure. It is not just money that is needed. People also need to understand the programming and the accountability of things that work.

In response to a question about Acton's percentage decreasing for FY20 while Boxborough's percentage stays the same, Dave Verdolino explained that the target contributions are intended to achieve a statewide result of the local share of foundation budget being funded 50% each from property wealth and income wealth. For Acton and Boxborough, changes in property and income wealth relative to changes in the rest of the state affect the target contributions. But in reality, actual required contributions are based on last year's contribution adjusted by a growth factor, and they do not impact our district budget process.

A member pointed out that a budget is a values statement. AB is experiencing an explosion in our demographics and we are not sure how to respond. We ask a lot of our community and provide excellence in return, but it is a lot to pay for.

It was asked if the state taxes for online purchasing and gambling/marijuana would offer opportunities for funding. Rep Benson replied that some does, but not a lot. Much of that funding is already divided up through the legislation and spoken for. A member noted that when children need help that have insurance, they often can't get it. The children who don't have insurance often do get assistance, including mental health services. Rep Benson stated that the Speaker has said that pediatric and mental health will be one of his priorities. She agrees that this is critical because many children are in school with teachers more than at home so support is needed there.

Mike Balulescu, Acton-Boxborough Education Association President, requested on behalf of more than 400 AB educators that the School Committee support the Fund our Future Campaign. He asked them to "stand arm in arm with the ABEA and the MTA" in favor of this resolution. Mike stated that Senator Eldridge, Representative Benson and Representative Gouveia have all voiced their support. Mike read the proposed resolution into the record.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved to approve the resolution. Tessa McKinley seconded the motion. A member expressed his wholehearted support, especially with the District's goal of equity. It was seen as an important step to represent one of our values. Another member agreed thanking the legislators for recognizing that more is needed. She called it "a moral issue".

The ABRSC unanimously **VOTED** to approve the resolution.

11. School Building Project Update – Mary Brolin

Special Town Meetings are now being planned in both towns for mid-December. Everyone is invited to a training by Jason Tate from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance on April 10th in the Junior High Library regarding MA Campaign Law. Mary noted that understanding what education around a building campaign is versus advocacy is a responsibility for members.

Item 11.2 New ABRSC Subcommittee for Bonding was skipped due to the late hour.

12. **Proposal to Extend ABOSA and AFSCME Contracts One Year – VOTE - Marie Altieri**

Marie Altieri explained that the schedules a few years ago got off cycle for these two unions, compared to the Acton Boxborough Educators Association (ABEA). The Negotiations Subcommittee recommends that they be extended one year so all three unions can be negotiated over the next year.

Adam Klein moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: To ratify a one year collective bargaining agreement between the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee and the Acton-Boxborough Office Support Association (ABOSA) with no changes to the contractual language from the current collective bargaining agreement and a 1.75% salary increase. The new contract will begin on July 1, 2019, and expire on July 1, 2020.

Adam Klein moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: To ratify a one year collective bargaining agreement between the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) AFL-CIO, state council 93, local 1703 with no changes to the contractual language from the current collective bargaining agreement and a 1.75% salary increase. The new contract will begin on July 1, 2019, and expire on July 1, 2020.

John Petersen spoke from the audience with some concern about the process, not the settlement, of these decisions.

13. **Annual Town Meeting Preparations**

Diane Baum spoke briefly about Town Meeting preparations and announced that, due to the late hour and consistent with School Committee Operating Protocols, she requested that the Committee move to adjourn and postpone the remainder of the agenda items.

14. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

15. **FYI**

The ABRSC was adjourned at 10:03 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda, list of warrants