

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Approved Minutes

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

November 1, 2018
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Mary Brolin, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Angie Tso, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Michael Bo
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, 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** – *Diane Baum*
3. **Public Participation**
Per policy BEDH, members of the public may speak for up to 2 minutes on items not included on this agenda. Comments regarding items on the agenda should be made during that part of the meeting. Typically, the Committee/Administration will not respond to comments during public participation.

John Petersen spoke about the upcoming election. He referred to the agenda items that the School Committee would be discussing and potentially voting positions on and noted that members have a greater burden than individuals do because they have been elected to represent the citizens. He stated that committee members' opinions should be based on their own judgements, not community opinion, per the quote by Edmund Burke in 1774.

Another parent expressed his concern about the security of the Administration Building. It is "beyond unacceptable" in his opinion that there are times when the doors are not locked. Mr. Light explained that parents walk their children into the classrooms at drop off and pick up so that is when the door is not locked. The Superintendent will speak with the parent further.

4. **Student Representatives' Update**
Michael Cheng noted the many recent acts of hate nationally and locally. A statement was ready by Mr. Dorey to all students on Tuesday which was appreciated. Today was early action college application deadline for seniors. The end of the term is next Monday so many exams are taking place. This is the end of the time to request schedule changes. Proscenium Circus is performing The Hunchback of Notre Dame and all of the sports teams made the playoffs. The students' updates are much appreciated by the School Committee.
5. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes (10/18/18)** – *Diane Baum*
Diane Baum read the warrant information and the Committee signed the documents. Mary Brolin moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and the Committee unanimously voted approval of the minutes of 10/18/18 as written.
6. **Superintendent's Update** – *Peter Light*

The Superintendent read his update entitled “Some Thoughts on Inclusivity” and it was very well received. This will be sent to all families and staff, and posted on the website.

7. **Presentation: Equity Update: Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (S.E.E.D.)**

Overview - Maureen Lin, Val Glod Gransewicz

Deborah Bookis introduced Val Glod Gransewicz and Maureen Lin, special educators at the Jr High. This work is included under the District’s Vision Equity Goal #2. It is a program out of Wellesley College that creates “conversational communities” to “drive personal, organizational and societal change toward greater equity and diversity. It is Val and Maureen’s hope that they will grow their body of leaders over the summer. The District has trained 80 certified staff of about 480 staff already.

Committee members were very interested. They liked that there is a natural component that brings the work into the classroom. Leaders want the conversations to happen everywhere though, not just in the social studies classroom. Mr. Light added that the District plans to partner with the Anti-Defamation League and their World of Difference Program, which, similar to SEED, is peer led.

A member asked if there is a way to measure the success of this program. It was pointed out that there are many other measurable goals and multiple strategic actions under goal 2.

8. **Presentation: ABRSD Community Education and Extended Day Update/Overview –**

Erin Bettez, Kate Murray

Community Education Director Erin Bettez began by saying that AB’s program is not a typical Community Education program. The Program continues to do very well. Last year was a high point with the Program contributing over \$900,000 to the school district. They are planning to move to district-wide before and after school child care. They have successfully transitioned the Summer Day Program from the Administration Building to the Junior High, and have a new end of summer program to respond to a community need.

Extended Day Director Kate Murray spoke about how the program has expanded to include six sites. Marie Altieri was thanked for her support during this transition. As a result, assistant support was added in our elementary classrooms. With enrollment of 636 students this year, approximately ¼ of all elementary students participated in Extended Day. There are over 70 paid staff. The “To Do” List includes how Extended Day can best support our families in need, which includes consideration of an in-house scholarship program vs. using state vouchers and expanding it to all 6 programs. They also want to examine some flexible scheduling and perhaps hourly rates to see what makes sense regarding cost and staffing required.

A member noted that it seems like Extended Day has done a great job of recognizing the value of each of the schools’ programs and made them all work. Professional Development training is now offered to all 6 programs, not individual schools doing their own. Centralization of the program under Community Education has also allowed for flexible staffing between programs when needed. Extended Day is offered on some days when there is no school for students unless closure is due to unsafe weather.

The Superintendent thanked Erin and Kate, and all of their staff, for their successful efforts bringing these independent programs together this year and still maintaining their special cultures. He noted that this presentation is an update to the District Goal #2 (same as SEED). The first part was an update on changes from last year and how they have gone. The second

part was to look forward to items such as a voucher system and how families have to contribute to their children's education.

9. **Financial Update** – *Dave Verdolino*

9.1. 1st Quarter FY19 Report

9.2. Student Activities Account Report – **VOTE** (*next meeting*)

9.3. FY18 E&D Certification (FYI)

Dave Verdolino reported that E&D is relatively flat from 2017-18, but this is an achievement because \$710,000 was transferred to fund the school building feasibility study and \$575,000 as put toward implementation of single-tier elementary busing costs for the first year. July 1, 2018 E&D has been certified at \$4,082,325 (4.6%).

The transportation fund was briefly mentioned as an account where funds could be placed. Dave will come back to that in the future. A member emphasized the importance of budgeting conservatively to prevent surprises in the future, including changes in state aid, transportation reimbursement, earnings or other possibilities. Dave is gathering information for a possible Moody's upgrade call soon. The new Capital Improvement Subcommittee met recently. FY20 Budget Development has begun with discussion at ALG and the Acton Finance Committee Point of View document. Slide 7 regarding the Table 6 Calculation Preview is important because this year (FY19) is the final one for the 60%-40% allocation per the revised Regional Agreement. The shift will become much more moderate and eventually will be exclusively based on a per pupil allocation. A "Budget 101" session will be set up soon for newer members of the Committee.

10. **School Building Project** – *Mary Brolin*

10.1. Recommendation to Approve the ABRSD Educational Plan – Second Read – **VOTE** - *Marie Altieri*

Marie Altieri introduced Emily Grandstaff-Rice, architect from Arrowstreet. Once approved, the Educational Plan will be forwarded along with additional documentation by the School Building Committee to the MSBA as part of the Preliminary Design Program. School Committee members were thanked for their extensive discussion and constructive input at the First Reading of the Plan at their meeting on October 18, 2018, as well as since then. Their participation in the visioning sessions was particularly appreciated.

The Committee was asked if they had any further comments. Members really liked the flow of the revised document and how well it was written. Members appreciated the concept of the "building as an educational tool" and the look toward education in the future. Members expressed concern about the sections on reading, literacy and ELA given the current research on the science of how children learn to read but, overall, supported the Educational Plan.

Mary Brolin thanked Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis and all of the teachers, staff and community members that have participated in this process so far.

Mary Brolin moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to approve the Educational Plan and authorized the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Building Committee to submit the Education Plan to the Massachusetts School Building Authority on behalf of the district.

10.2. Building Committee meeting on Oct 24

On Monday night a vote of approval will be taken on the larger document that includes the Educational Plan. Peter Light, Marie Altieri and JD Head attended the Story of a Building meeting and found it very helpful to see this school with 1,000 students that opened 2 years ago.

11. **FY19 Superintendent Goals – Second Read – VOTE - Peter Light**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED** to approve the FY19 Superintendent Goals.

12. **NEW: Discussion of Ballot Questions and Possible Position Votes**

Diane Baum began by saying that this School Committee, unlike many other districts, does not have a rich history of deliberating MASC resolutions or ballot questions relevant to our students. Given the political climate and her desire that the School Committee should be responsive to the public, she felt it would be disingenuous in her role as School Committee spokesperson to speak on behalf of the Committee on these issues without first consulting members. She said she would like to begin by asking members if they agreed that it was appropriate to weigh-in on these issues.

12.1. **Town of Acton Ballot Question 1 – Shall the Town Adopt the Following Bylaw: Chapter Z – Marijuana Establishments**

School Committee members' comments included:

- This is an Acton question and not appropriate for a regional committee. Is it appropriate for only Acton members to discuss it?
- Some felt there were direct consequences for students, others disagreed calling it a zoning issue. The Committee would voice their opinion if a zoning issue was near a school.
- Per the Operating Protocols, members should feel empowered to freely express their opinions, even in times of disagreement, particularly given the Committee's priority being the students' needs and interests.
- The public is asking for members to speak and share their opinions on this topic as related to students' wellness.
- If the community is going to request members' opinions of political questions, it would be best if it could take place before early voting begins.
- School Committee members still have individual rights about sensitive issues and can reserve their opinions and cast their vote privately.
- Members can have 2 viewpoints – a personal one and a Committee member one. There is a difference between what is good for your own child and good for the district's children.
- Adding this agenda item so close to the meeting makes it difficult to adequately prepare one's thoughts and opinions on the issues and creates pressure. Due to the increasing pressure by the community over the last 2 days, the Chair spoke with the AG's office about the process of adding it to the agenda, and decided to do so.
- Members did not want to pressure any member into discussing something that they are uncomfortable with given the short notice.
- Other school communities have discussed ballot questions and that is what the public was asking the Committee to do. Adding the agenda item sent a signal that the Committee heard the request, but given the timing the Committee did not have ability to thoroughly consider the issues and come to consensus. This was

particularly true since AB does not have any policy, procedures, or history for this particular topic.

- If consensus was not reached on this question, then some members thought the next question should not be discussed. Some members disagreed saying that they were separate issues.

Diane Baum stated that she did not hear any consensus that the School Committee should move forward with discussing Acton's Question 1 at that time.

Given the large number of community members in the audience, the Chair agreed to hear their thoughts. Comments included:

- Please protect the most vulnerable, the students.
- How could this question possibly be good for students?
- Passage of this question could significantly diminish what the schools have created and create a spiraling effect on the property taxes and values.
- The State Ethics Commission has an advisory based on MGL 268A (11-1) that should be reviewed by the School Committee.
- Boxborough's Special Town Meeting did vote in favor of a ban, and it will be on their May ballot. The Committee's consideration and discussion was appreciated.
- As elected leaders, the public wants to know your views. School is a united community and the Acton and Boxborough members should not be divided.

Several Committee members said they were prepared to consider a position after hearing the public. A Boxborough member said that she is opposed only because she is not an Acton voter. Another member said they would have to abstain given the lack of adequate time to prepare. A member agreed that there was not enough time to be fully prepared, but stressed that the question does relate directly to School Committee policies, like the one about alcohol use.

As requested, Peter Light read School Committee Member Authority policy BBAA outlining members' duties. He stated that as a paid employee of the district, he cannot comment on how people should vote. The Administration can advise regarding factual information, but cannot have an opinion on these matters.

Diane Baum was not comfortable asking for consensus given the amount of ongoing disagreement.

12.2. **State Ballot Question 3 Referendum on an Existing Law regarding Gender Identity in Places of Public Accommodation**

12.2.1. ABRSD Equal Educational Opportunities Policy JB and Students who are Transgender and /or Gender Nonconforming Procedures JB-R

Because many School Committees have voted a position on this issue, Diane Baum asked if members would like to discuss and vote on one.

Comments included:

- The School Committee has strong policies in place protecting the rights of transgender students; supporting this ballot question would be an extension of our support.
- If there was not enough time and information for the previous question, it should be true for this one and it should not be discussed.

- A member stated that a request was made to add this within the 48 hour posting requirement and it was turned down. Diane responded that because debate of Resolution 7 was on the agenda, it was likely that this topic would come up so she initially decided not to include it. When feedback from the public increased in the previous 2 days, she wanted to give the Committee the option to discuss it so she added it to the agenda.
- This question is about discrimination and the Committee does have policies in place about that so as community leaders, a position should be voted. The Committee has taken a public stand on discrimination.
- A member had a different perspective that this is “a bill with a lot of legal loopholes, not a policy”. In the past few weeks many comments have been shared on social media on this topic, but she was concerned that they were all one-sided. She feels like she is the single voice and is being vulnerable by expressing a different opinion.
- While deliberating, the importance of members seeing themselves not as 11 individuals, but as a committee that has codified their position in our current policy, was stressed. The meeting was not a venue to talk about members’ personal views.

Comments from the public included:

- Please don’t bring political things into the schools because it will create conflict for parents and students.
- Mike Balulescu, President of the Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA), stated that as a junior high teacher, he often sees students who question their gender. He asked the School Committee to do everything in their power to protect those most vulnerable students who need support. He said that he was speaking for himself and the teachers and endorsed the Committee discussing this and voting yes on question 3.
- A parent of a transgendered child stated that his wellbeing is not a political issue. A no on question 3 would repeal the current protections and allow her child to be kicked out of many public places. The existing school committee policy is a strong statement of support for this issue.
- The line from the current Superintendent’s Update was read, “I want to take this opportunity to reiterate, on behalf of all of our district leaders, faculty and staff throughout the district that we will not tolerate, accept, condone, or be silent with regard to bias and hate.” The citizen urged the Committee to support the existing policies at AB, stating that saying no to 3 is singling out a particular, vulnerable group. There has been no uptick in safety issues in public bathrooms since the law went into effect according to the speaker.
- Concern was expressed for this group of children with a suicide rate that is much higher than typical.
- The Committee was urged to focus on current laws and policies that protect groups instead of “prior to an election trying to swing the vote”. If the current policy did not work, he would encourage them to do something, but that is not the case.

It was stated that some parents left because they had been waiting so long and others learned about it so late that they could not attend.

The Chair asked the Committee if they could proceed to a vote.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved that the Committee overwhelmingly support YES on Question 3. The motion was seconded by Mary Brolin.

Discussion:

Committee members recognized that there are people in our community that are not comfortable with this ballot question. It was pointed out that the Committee was doing a good job of modeling how to have difficult conversations in the community. A member appreciated the conversation and respect shown across the whole table.

A member stated that as elected officials, School Committee members are political, and need to take a stand on issues at times. Another member felt there was not enough education to understand the question at this time and was concerned about how members were disagreeing with each other. Several members hoped that everyone felt listened to and respected.

The Committee VOTED approval of the motion. (YES: Baum, Brolin, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy NO: Tso ABSTAIN: Zhang)

13. **Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) – Diane Baum**

13.1. Delegate and Alternate Selection for the Meeting on November 9th

Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley and Angie Tso will be attending the conference next week in Hyannis.

Ginny Kremer moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to have Diane Baum be the delegate for the MASC

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that Tessa McKinley be the alternate.

13.2. Request for Consensus of the ABRSC Regarding 9 Proposed Resolutions

Diane Baum handled this item as a consent agenda asking question by question if members wanted to hold out any particular question for individual discussion.

The Committee held Resolution 2 and Resolution 6 from the group of resolutions.

Mary Brolin moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: that the ABRSC support Resolution 1,3,4,5, 7, 8 and 9.

A member was confused about some wording on Resolution 2 “On Small and Rural Districts”, but when it was explained, he was in support. A member was not totally familiar with this issue so she would be comfortable letting the AB delegate listen to the discussion at the meeting and make the decision. Mary Brolin felt the Town of Boxborough was fully involved when full regionalization was being done. She expressed concern that because it involves funding, the resolution could put AB at risk because any change is likely to hurt the more privileged communities.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve Resolution 2.

A member was not comfortable with Resolution 6 “Regarding Reproductive Health Education” because she didn’t know the context. Deborah Bookis explained that our parents can opt out of this instruction and can review all of the materials ahead of time. This is only in 5th and 6th grades for elementary schools and in our High School. We do not teach this subject in the Junior High right now. The health curriculum frameworks are being revised.

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was,
VOTED: to approve Resolution 6. (YES: Baum, Brolin, Klein, Kremer,
Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Zhang ABSTAIN: Tso)

14. CONSENT AGENDA:

- 14.1. Recommendation to Accept FY19 Gifts from Acton Elementary Schools’
PTOs/PTSOs to the ABRSD – **VOTE** – *Peter Light*

This agenda item was held from the Consent Agenda.

As they have done a number of times in the past, committee members discussed the practice of having PTOs/PTSOs pay for classroom assistants, with concern being expressed. Although very grateful to the families for their generosity every year, some members feel it creates inequity among the schools and critical staff should be funded by the district. A member reminded members that classroom assistants are not certified staff yet are impactful on school culture and support individual school philosophies. Marie Altieri reminded the Committee that the big change last year was that the before/after school program added 12 hours of assistant support for every classroom, but there are still differences in the schools. It was agreed not to review the PTO donations at that time, but it is an issue that is still being worked through. This vote is to accept the money that has already been raised per current guidelines.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept the PTOs/PTSOs gifts with gratitude.

- 14.2. Recommendation to Approve Field Trip to Quebec for Nordic Ski Team –
VOTE – *Peter Light*

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the field trip to Quebec.

Given the hour, members agreed to hear Subcommittee and Member Reports at the next School Committee meeting.

15. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- 15.1. Policy – meeting on Oct 30 - *Amy Krishnamurthy*
- 15.2. Capital Improvement – meeting on Oct 24
- 15.3. Budget – meeting on Oct 30 – *Mary Brolin*
- 15.4. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) meeting on Oct 25 – *Paul Murphy*
- 15.5. Others

The ABRSC was adjourned at 10:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda, list of warrants