

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)  
Approved Minutes

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School  
16 Charter Road, Acton, MA 01720

November 15, 2018  
7:00 p.m.

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Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Mary Brolin, Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy (7:20 p.m.), Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy (7:18 p.m.), Angie Tso, Eileen Zhang  
Members Absent: Ginny Kremer  
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. **Chairman's Introduction** – *Diane Baum*
3. **Public Participation** - none  
*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.*
4. **Student Representatives' Update - Michael Cheng**  
Michael Cheng updated the Committee on students' interest in the snow storm expected that night, the Veterans Day breakfast and upcoming Cabaret show. Diwali was recognized at the High School for the first time and as a result of the Indian holiday, there was no homework.
5. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes (11/1/18, next meeting)** – *Diane Baum*  
Diane Baum read the warrant information and the Committee signed the documents. The minutes of 11/1/18 will be voted on at the next meeting due to insufficient time to review.
6. **Superintendent's Update** – *Peter Light*  
The Superintendent updated members on
  - the Building Project and two Community Forums on November 27 and 29,
  - his Entry Plan and intention to present the final Report at the January 10 meeting,
  - the FY20 Budget planning being done by the Leadership Team and Budget Subcommittee
  - FY19 School delays and cancellations process
7. **Presentation: Enrollment Projections and Elementary Class Size Update** – *Marie Altieri*
  - 7.1. Presentation Slides
  - 7.2. Enrollment Charts
  - 7.3. NESDEC Projected EnrollmentMarie Altieri reported that the K-12 Enrollment Projections overall are flat compared to last year. The projections were very accurate although kindergarten continues to be difficult to

predict overall as well as by town. The official October 1, 2018 actual number of kindergarteners is 330. The projection was for 314 students.

Marie recommended that the number of kindergarten classes stay the same for next year, but that one kindergarten section be moved from Blanchard to Douglas. This would mean 14 Acton classrooms and 3 in Boxborough for 17 total. Registration is done in March for kindergarten. If 308 children or more register in Acton and cannot be balanced between the two towns, a proposal will be made for another kindergarten class. Because there are no extra classrooms, this would have to be carefully evaluated. Marie was complimented on being conservative in planning for kindergarten sections, particularly because projections are done based on children's birth year, but that is not necessarily the year they begin kindergarten.

Marie confirmed that the new school plans are being designed to accommodate these projected number of students. Classrooms can be added as enrollment changes to stay within the class size guidelines. She noted one of the drivers of the curve in slide 9 of the projections was housing sales. In 2015, they went way up and continued to do so for about 15 months. Historically the District has used two sets of enrollment projections – New England School Development Council (NESDEC)'s and the Ashtons'. Because the Ashtons have retired, the District is now using NESDEC and working with MSBA data. It was clarified that the class size numbers are not policy, but guidelines. At the Junior High and High School level, there are trends, patterns and goals.

8. **Presentation: RJGJHS Class Size Update** – *Principal Andrew Shen*

Principal Shen reported that currently there are 924 Junior High students, 4 more than projected.

The Committee discussed how students use the Academic Support Center and then transition to the High School. Every year is a transition in the Junior High because it is just 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. There is an effort to try to keep special education students in district. In response to a question, Mr. Shen said that while MTSS is not being implemented in its purest form, it is an aspiration at the Junior High. A system is in place where teachers address when they see a student who has needs, including a process for referrals and assistance. There is a culture where students can feel comfortable asking teachers for help.

When asked if he is comfortable with the percentage increase projected on slide 16, Mr. Shen replied that there will probably be more students arriving at the Junior High on IEPs, but maybe not as many as projected. The interaction between lower grade teachers and the Junior High staff about students that are coming is ongoing. The Superintendent added that when they look at specific students coming up it is not practical to look more than one year out, but they do look at profiles of needs shifts, like autism spectrum and social emotional needs. Dawn Bentley agreed with this description.

Some concern was expressed about the class sizes in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Exploratory classes (slide 10) and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math (slide 8). It is difficult to add an exploratory class due to the teaming structure. Regarding math instruction, Mr. Shen said that many of the math teachers are used to large class sizes so he has some confidence that this is not an area of particular concern. At the Junior High level, he felt that assistants are not as common so they would not advance a model that added more assistants. Supporting teachers who are working with many students is more likely.

9. **Presentation: ABRHS Class Size, Schedule Change Update, and School Improvement Plan Goals Report** – *Principal Larry Dorey, Associate Principal Beth Baker*

Principal Dorey thanked Data Manager, Tina Vanasse for her efforts in this area. Although Powerschool is used for scheduling, much is also done manually to try to make classes work out best for the maximum number of students. Each year class sizes have slightly improved over the past few years, however the range is very important to consider as well.

Referring to the History of Schedule Change/Timeline (slide 6), the High School is now 3 years into the schedule change process. There is agreement that 45 minute class periods is not enough time for how we want students to learn and teachers to teach, and do extended learning. As a pilot for next year, they are looking into doing a “Seven Period Drop 1 Schedule” as well as a “Seven Period with Rotating Long Block”. A member commented that there is cognitive research that says students’ attention span lasts about 10 minutes and she asked if there will be pushback from students about longer classes. Associate Principal Beth Baker responded that last year most of their professional development time was focused on learning how to teach differently to address some of this. The High School department leaders and staff have been looking at this type of schedule for a long time. Two math teachers doing great work on discussion in their classes were cited as good examples. This also supports social and emotional learning and there are lots of cross work opportunities.

The School Goals Report focused on the Driving Question of “How can staff, students, and families support wellness and balance within a rich learning environment that provides opportunities for all students to experience success?”

The Committee discussed how this pilot would require a change in how teachers teach and how the High School administration would support them. Beth Baker and Larry Dorey elaborated on the amount of research that exists about how to teach in longer periods, and how some departments have wanted to do projects in longer time periods and are excited about being able to do this now. Teachers are looking for more inquiry based learning done by students and that takes more classroom time. AB staff has the knowledge and skills to do this, but they currently don’t have the time in class, although some teachers do need assistance. The last professional development day had current teachers sharing their expertise with others, and it was “wonderful”.

A member loved the overall focus on wellness, and particularly Mr. Dorey’s description of trying to “turn down the temperature of the building” to alleviate stress. He was asked if the High School currently has four 47 minute lunch periods and next year that will be cut to three, will that mean more waiting in lines (and stress) for students. The principal replied that not all kids use the lunchroom and he feels the change can be accommodated.

A member appreciated the last bullet of the the Goal 3 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion slide about creating Advisory Lessons focused on sharing stories to create conversations to promote and foster respect, understanding, empathy and appreciation for diverse experiences. The Committee discussed how the splitting of instruction time with lunch in the middle would work. Peter Light agreed with Larry Dorey that many schools do this successfully. This proposed type of schedule provides greater ability for collaboration, including teacher collaboration, so this would help with students’ academic support as well.

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

10.1. Presentation: Building Site Options – *Emily Grandstaff-Rice, Architect, Arrowstreet*

Emily Grandstaff-Rice updated the Committee on the site/program combination options, including a new facility on either the

- Gates property for Douglas, Gates and PreK
- Douglas property for Douglas, Gates and PreK
- Conant property for Douglas, Conant and PreK

She explained that there are a lot of things happening in parallel with the Building Committee now leading to the Building Committee's vote on December 19. Members were invited to the two upcoming community forums. An update will be provided at the December 6<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting as well although the final decision rests with the Building Committee and is due to the MSBA by January 2, 2019. It was noted that an option requiring a land sap and flood plain issue was ruled out.

- 10.1.1. School Building Committee Presentation, September 12, 2018 – Project Schedule
- 10.1.2. School Building Committee Presentation, October 24, 2018 – Site Review
- 10.2. Public Forums re Site Decision on: Tues, Nov 27 and Thu, Nov 29 at 7PM
- 10.3. Building Committee meeting minutes from Nov 5 and Oct 24 (next meetings are Nov 14 and Dec 12)

#### 11. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- 11.1. Policy – *Amy Krishnamurthy*
  - 11.1.1. Student School Bus Behavior Expectations, File: JICC/EEAEC – First Read  
Members should send comments/feedback by Monday night so it can be discussed at the next policy subcommittee meeting.
- 11.2. Capital Improvement – next meeting on Nov 29 - *Adam Klein*
- 11.3. Budget – next meeting on Nov 20 – *Amy Krishnamurthy*
- 11.4. Calendar – meeting on Nov 8 - *Marie Altieri*  
This new subcommittee includes teachers/administrators/school committee members. They plan to do a survey and present a proposed FY20 calendar for a First Read at the 12/6/18 School Committee meeting.
- 11.5. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Paul Murphy*
  - 11.5.1. Minutes from meeting on September 27 (next meeting is Nov 19)
- 11.6. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) – *Mary Brolin*  
A 0% increase was voted for Medex at their recent meeting. Next year's rates will be voted at their November 30 meeting.

#### 12. Recommendation to Approve Grant from the ABRPTSO to R.J. Grey Junior High to Defray Cost of 7<sup>th</sup> Graders' Homework Organizational Folders – VOTE - *Peter Light*

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED:** to approve this grant with gratitude.

#### 13. **FYI**

- 13.1. Memo from Deborah Bookis re: *Studio Thinking from the Start: The K-8 Art Educator's Handbook* – This was highlighted as a very exciting achievement.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of documents used: list of warrants, see agenda