

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting
To attend: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505>
To call in: 312 626 6799

July 1, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. **Call to Order (7:00)**

Chairperson Tessa McKinley called the ABRSC to order at 7:01 p.m.

Due to the schools being closed as a result of the coronavirus, the meeting was conducted both in person and remotely via a Zoom webinar. Members Kyra Cook and Yebin Wang participated via zoom and the remaining 9 School Committee members were in the auditorium, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. Members and administrators in the auditorium wore masks and sat at least six feet apart.

Public participation was possible via the zoom link or call in phone number. The auditorium was not open to the public. The open meeting was recorded and being live streamed. Meetings are posted on Acton TV's website at <http://actontv.org/on-demand/government>. Per the remote policy, all votes were done by roll call with each member stating their vote after the Chairperson called their name.

2. **OPEN MEETING**

2.1. **Chairman's Welcome**

2.1.1. Kyra Cook and Yebin Wang, the new Acton School Committee members, were welcomed.

2.1.2. Annual Town Meeting Updates

Tessa thanked everyone who attended the Annual Town Meetings on Monday night and to all of the school and Towns' staff that made them possible. The FY21 budget passed with strong support.

2.2. **Public Participation - none**

3. **ABRSC ANNUAL ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING**

3.1. **FYI:** School Committee Annual Organizational Meeting Policy, File: BDA and REVISED Procedures, File: BDA-R and School Committee Officers Policy, File: BDB

Tessa explained the revision to the procedures that were agreed to at the previous meeting. After review by counsel, it was advised that the paper ballot method would likely be seen as voting by "secret ballot" which is expressly prohibited by the Open Meeting Law. As a result, the new version of the procedures specifies that a roll call vote will be used. There was consensus of agreement from the members.

3.2. **Election of Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Officers for FY21**

3.2.1. Chairperson – **VOTE** – *Peter Light*

The Superintendent opened the floor for nominations for Chairperson for FY21. He reminded members that seconds are not needed for a nomination. Ginny Kremer nominated Tessa McKinley. Angie Tso nominated John Petersen.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to close the nomination period.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Tessa McKinley accepted the nomination, stating that it has been a long hard year but she sees value in continuity right now. She would be honored to be chairperson again. John Petersen accepted the nomination, noting that he would be happy to be chair again as well. He added that while he has opinions and enjoys expressing them, he understands what when members vote as a committee, they must support the committee's decisions 100%.

Members' comments included:

- Tessa has done a fantastic job - she is fair and has worked hard.
- Tessa has been phenomenal.
- It has been a tough year. It's not a good time for change.
- The length of the meetings is a concern. They need to be run efficiently.
- John is a consummate School Committee member with extensive knowledge, especially regarding the budget.
- John has previous experience on the School Committee and did a good job at Town Meeting.
- We have two extremely qualified candidates, making it very hard to choose.

Members **VOTED by Roll Call**, stating their choice for Chairperson:

Tessa McKinley: Abayaah-Issah (B), Baum (A), Cook (A), Klein (B), Kremer (A), Krishnamurthy (A), McKinley (B), Shine (B)

Results: 4 Acton votes x 2.5 plus 4 Boxborough votes = 14

John Petersen: Petersen (A), Tso (A), Wang (A)

Results: 3 Acton votes x 2.5 = 7.5

Tessa McKinley was named the FY21 Chairperson.

3.2.2. Vice Chairperson(s) – **VOTE** – *New Chair*

Tessa McKinley opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chairperson from Acton for FY21.

Diane Baum nominated John Petersen.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to close the nominations.

Members unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** that John Petersen serve as Vice-Chair from Acton.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Tessa McKinley opened the floor for nominations for Vice-Chairperson from Boxborough for FY21.

Amy Krishnamurthy nominated Adam Klein.

John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to close the nominations.

Members unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** that Adam Klein serve as Vice-Chair from Boxborough.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

3.3. **Appointment of Margaret Dennehy as ABRSD Treasurer – VOTE – Tessa McKinley (New Chair)**

John Petersen moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to appoint Margaret Dennehy as ABRSD Treasurer.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Mr. Light thanked Margaret for an absolutely exceptional job this year and particularly with the District bonding this past Spring. Tessa agreed, noting how fortunate we are to have Margaret working on our team.

3.4. **Appointment of Beth Petr as ABRSC Executive Secretary – VOTE – Tessa McKinley (New Chair)**

Adam Klein moved, Nora Shine seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to appoint Beth Petr as ABRSC Executive Secretary.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

The Superintendent thanked Beth for her depth of knowledge and commitment to the Committee. Tessa thanked Beth for her extraordinary efforts during the shutdown while working from home.

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

4.1. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 6/18/2020 – **VOTE** – Tessa McKinley

Two amendments were suggested. The HIT update should say 11 months instead of 10. Two sentences regarding STEAM assessments were added to the end.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Nora Shine seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to approve the minutes of 6/18/20 as amended.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang ABSTAINED: Kremer)

4.2. School Opening Update – Peter Light

DESE guidance was received last week about schools reopening in the fall. Key components include:

- Current medical research supports a safe in-person return to school – given preventative measures.
- Measures include: masks/face coverings, physical distancing, handwashing, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
- Masks will be required for students grade 2 and above and all adults. They are recommended for students in grade 1 and below.
- A minimum physical distance of 3 feet has been established, in conjunction with the measures.

The District will develop three separate plans: full in-person instruction with safety requirements, full remote learning, and hybrid learning combining in-person and remote learning. At this time, the District plans to return to full in-person instruction in September. This is subject to change.

A new section of the website is being developed for families so they can access all of this information in one place and make informed decisions. It will include links to current research. Families have been surveyed regarding their initial feelings about their own children returning in the fall. In the first 24 hours, 2,500 responses were received. The Administration knows that we will have to have some plan for some students who cannot return in the fall. They are really trying to understand if given the option of in-school vs remote learning, which choice parents would make at this time, and what level of confidence do they have that they will stick with that choice. So far, the survey is showing a high degree of confidence so people appear to feel fairly sure of their thoughts. Currently families are saying that 16-17 % of our students don't intend to return in the fall. Extrapolating that out translates to roughly 60 students per grade not being in the buildings. Administrators need to know fairly soon so staff can be allocated in a thoughtful way. In 2 or 3 weeks, parents will be asked to commit to a choice, and whether they will use the buses or transport students themselves because there has to be a transportation plan. Families will be asked to commit for the year because we can't staff for flexibility during the year.

Our leadership team has identified some critical steps that will be released soon. One is a clear description of the learning modes including curriculum and synchronized vs asynchronous so parents can make good decisions. Information will also be provided on extended day and how many students can be accommodated. Families with younger children need to know now what will be offered so they can plan. The survey data is needed now so JD Head can plan the transportation bus allocation. A critical question is whether they can run all 6 elementary schools with the same number of buses at the same start and end times. Some different start times may be needed. If additional buses are needed, the School Committee would be asked to vote the lease.

The plan is to release information weekly and mark what is new on the table of contents rather than waiting for the perfect document. With so many things changing, information is needed by everyone in a timely manner. The four planning teams, steering committee and leadership team are working very hard right now on all of this. The plan is to release information on Fridays.

Question: Regarding the medical studies about children, and other information that is coming out about how devastating the shut downs have been for many of them, Mr. Light was asked to share his thoughts on this topic. The member stated because nothing is risk free, it is necessary to return to in-person schooling. She also asked for his preliminary thoughts on how the special education students will be handled.

Answer: Special Education staff have been receiving all of the current information. Principals and staff will be carefully reviewing the preliminary survey choices made by our students who receive services, including ELL, as well as any students who staff have concerns about. They will be reviewed on a student by student basis. Principals and staff will reach out to the families to be sure there are appropriate supports in place for each of them before they commit to their plans for the fall. Guidance has not been received yet from DESE regarding specific special education processes. Mr. Light said that some Team Meetings may continue virtually as that has worked well for some families.

Regarding the first point, the state is exploring giving teachers extra professional development. The Administration would like more in concrete strategies, dialogue about race in the classrooms, expanding digital tool kits to transition back and forth between in-person and distance learning, and training regarding safety procedures for staff. These are the priority areas, but thinking about students' emotional state is first and foremost. Most parents really want their kids to have the social experience.

Question: Regarding transmission of the virus, is there an age where things shift?

Answer: The transmission rate is lower under 20 years old, although there is no one hard cutoff. It is measured in "bands". As people increase in age, the risk increases. There are no risk free choices.

Question: Has DESE put out anything regarding length of the day?

Answer: DESE said there could be some coming up regarding days in the school year and flexibility of hours total (990). There has to be the right balance for teachers to learn as well as time in front of kids.

Question: Will there be some kind of rubric or interactive forum to help support families in the fall? Will there be any counseling offered for families that may need some extra help?

Answer: These are great suggestions, and we are early in the process. A rubric or decision making matrix would be helpful for families trying to make decisions.

Question: Has DESE given any guidance about keeping teachers safe in the classroom?

Answer: Mr. Light hesitated to speak for DESE, but the move to require masks on as many students as possible has the adults in mind. There are many false negatives in regular temperature checks so that is not being considered. They are asking people to self screen and stay home if they feel sick.

Question: I'm wondering about the timing between when parents have to make the choice if their kids should return to school and when they will know what the school day would look like. This involves the social emotional status of kids and the timing of the information when they have to make the choice.

Answer: It depends on the level of detail people want. If it's about specials like music and art, they will know generally. If they want to know, "Will chorus run like usual?" that level of detail will come later. If the state doesn't provide the guidance information in a timely manner, the Administration cannot get it to parents to help them make their decisions.

Question: If families have committed to the in-person option for the year and there is an outbreak again, can they change their minds and do distance learning, or will school mark them absent?

Answer: This is a complicated question. The question would be if the change would be due to choice or need. We could see pandemic changes and may need to close all schools, or one of the schools and then we would do it. If a student needs to quarantine due to family travels, that would happen. There could be medical or other reasons to move a child to distance learning. It will be very difficult to provide flexibility if the request is just a choice.

Question: Is the school in contact with the towns so we know if there is an infection?

Answer: Yes. It is about doing contact tracing as quickly as possible so we are in daily contact.

Question: Will the school provide grades if there is remote learning for next year?

Answer: Mr. Light is working under the only assumption that we will return to a normal grading system. A key in the decision to not issue grades this past year is that it was a new environment for our students and our teachers. We have now experienced some of the pros and cons of distance learning so he is comfortable with the normal grading now. DESE has given the same guidance that districts return to grades. Students are also more comfortable with distance learning now if that is what they are doing.

Question: It wasn't that long ago that we were debating whether to wear masks or not. It's been "learn as we go" through all of this. There is a lot of distrust among people about the information that is coming out (not necessarily from the schools). Reassurance is needed.

Answer: Mr. Light agreed. There are lots of reasons why some people don't trust the information. This virus is still very much an unknown and the medical community is learning. The website will have all of the information on there for families, including the research if they want that level of detail.

Question: For families that choose not to return in person in the fall, will there be additional survey questions asking them whether they will use our distance learning or some other type of homeschooling?

Answer: Our distance learning will be as close to what in class students are doing as possible. Homeschooling is different. It might be helpful to remind families that if they are considering homeschooling or a separate online school (not AB's distance learning), they need to unenroll their child and let the District know.

Question: Why did you not offer a hybrid model in the survey?

Answer: We will do that with more details in the next survey in a few weeks. We really want our kids here. Everything is about weighing risk and what you get from it. With a hybrid option, no one really wins. You get some distance but you sacrifice because it assumes all families can figure out how to make it work for them and often their jobs. The quality of what people get in the week on/week off environment can be tough. Staffing is also very challenging for a hybrid. Our staff's home communities may be doing things different from us, making it a significant challenge.

Question: What can you take away from all of this?

Answer: John Petersen reminded everyone that there are countries like South Korea and New Zealand that have been successful. The Commonwealth is now tracking well with infection rates, etc. If people do the right things, John felt we could probably successfully go back in the fall.

Question: If we go back, do we assume all classes go back, particularly in the High School?

Answer: We will explore that this summer. Chromebooks have been ordered for all High School students so we will be almost 1:1 for all students. That will be a significant help for some of the courses. There are some classes that require shared equipment and will need to be sanitized often, or a curriculum change. We won't know if we can really run all of the courses until we know what students will be returning.

Question: What is the strategy of the work to keep the students in district?

Answer: Our overall strategy is that we want as many students in person as possible. That is the best education that we can provide and it is even more important for the more vulnerable students. We have to work with our families to make informed decisions keeping in mind what is best for kids, with their input.

Question: How do you help parents make informed decisions about where their child will learn?

Answer: Often we make these decisions on a school by school basis, but none of the elementary schools will be able to have their own distance learning program. As a result, those doing distance learning will, in a sense, leave their elementary school and join the distance learning program, then rejoin their actual school in person next year. This will be a district wide offering. It is important for parents to realize this.

4.3. **Budget Update – Dave Verdolino**

The FY20 budget closing is in progress and there is nothing new to report. FY21 budgets were approved, so there is no need for the 1/12 exercise. Dave will report on the COVID relief fund support as we go along. No news is expected about the state budget until mid to late July.

Regarding the COVID funds and FY20 expenses, a question was asked if it would preclude staff that had been intended for the entire year. Dave said that the rules are not available yet. If an expense can be pinned directly on covid, it would be good, but if it's not clear, we are not sure at this time. The state's 1/12th FY21 budget will not affect the District. We are still paying out of district tuitions and the only guidance is that they must be paid. We are also paying 100% of the collaborative tuitions because we are part of them. Private schools are another matter. We petitioned to try to get some relief there, but there has not been any response yet.

A member asked if it would impact us if more students decide not to take the bus in the fall. State transportation aid is a cost reimbursement so if we are transporting kids (more than 1.5 miles from school) the district receives 75% reimbursement. If we need to engage more buses, that would increase our cost and we would be reimbursed. There's always a one year lag to this. Most state aid is tied to students, but not transportation. Transportation is tied to how much we spend on it.

4.4. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

4.4.1. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light

4.4.1.1. Minutes of meeting on 6/10/20

There is a lot of activity going on around Gates. There have been some bumps including one regarding the septic. We are working with the Board of Health. Significant ledge was found when they started digging for the underground tanks making that location not possible. A new location is being redesigned, although this is not a critical piece of summer work right now. There was also a miscommunication between our design team and the contractor, resulting in the contractor not getting information from the conservation committee regarding what area could not be touched. This was an error on our part, not the Town's and we are trying to fix it.

4.5. **Recommendation to Accept \$600 Donation in Memory of Wilbert and Jayne Foertsch to the District for Ipad for Students in Need – Roll Call VOTE – Peter Light**

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to accept this gift with gratitude.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

5. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – Tessa McKinley**

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: To approve the Payroll warrant(s) as follows –

Number P2026/P2026B dated 6/18/20 in the amount of \$9,394,830.96;

Payroll deduction warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-026PR dated 6/18/20 in the amount of \$3,154,324.48;

Vendor warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-026 dated 6/25/20 in the amount of \$1,070,415.90;

Student Activity reimbursement warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-026SH dated 6/25/20 in the amount of \$35,615.25

Number 20-026JH dated 6/25/20 in the amount of \$4,247.15.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

6. **FYI**

As previously mentioned, copies of How To Be An Antiracist by Ibram X.Kendi have been offered to all staff for a district wide read and discussion this summer. At the request of our leadership team, Attorney Colby Brunt recently offered a professional learning opportunity for our High School English and Social Studies teachers regarding how to handle in class the intersection of race and racism, rights and free speech, and the electoral process that will take place this fall. We want to be sure our educators understand the boundaries, and how to best handle the students speaking up about current events in the classroom. The program was recorded and will be shared with our other educators. School Committee members appreciated being given a copy of the book and that they were ordered through our local West Acton bookstore, The Silver Unicorn. Mr. Light noted how helpful the owner has been with the process. It was noted that other School Committees are looking into the SEED training that our district did in 2018. It was hoped that AB can continue this in the future.

Mr. Light reported that major work is being done on Charter Road, per the Capital Plan. This includes a 10 foot wide mixed use path, widening the road, raising speed bumps, and improving pedestrian access. All of the telephone poles are being relocated to accommodate the wider road. We learned that the water line was over 50 years old and the water department wanted to replace it so work will be a bit delayed and it will be rough for a little longer than originally planned.

John Petersen reported that at Acton Town Meeting, “What are you doing about Black Lives Matter?” was a theme in a number of the discussions. Referring to Frederick Douglass’ speech on the dedication of the Emancipation Memorial in 1876, John noted that history is made by people and people are complicated. You can’t oversimplify things.

7. **Adjourn**

Ginny Kremer moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED by Roll Call: to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda

NEXT MEETINGS: July 30 workshop, August 13 and 27 (if needed) business meetings