

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

Sargent Memorial Library
427 Massachusetts Avenue
Boxborough, MA

July 16, 2019
5:00 p.m. Gathering 5:45 Call to Order

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo (7:15 pm), Ginny Kremer (7:50 pm), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy (left 5:55, returned 6:15pm), John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: Adam Klein
Others: Tony Bent, Ed.D., Peter Light, Beth Petr

1. **Gathering/Light Dinner**

2. **Welcome and Purpose of the Workshop** – *Diane Baum and Tessa McKinley*

Chairperson Diane Baum called the ABRSC to order at 5:45 and introduced Tony Bent. Tony reviewed the agenda reminding the Committee that “There’s no ‘I’ in team.” and that is why leadership is so important.

3. **The Leadership Hourglass**

- Agreements/Disagreements/Questions
- What is your Story? What brought you to the school committee?

Building culture is the most important part of leadership, followed by building capacity. Members identified and discussed pieces of the Hourglass that were important to them. There were several interpretations of what “Saying yes as often as possible.” means. It can mean saying “no” to a request but asking for more information that could lead to “yes” eventually. Tony highly recommended Brene Brown’s book, Dare to Lead.

Members shared their stories about how and why they came to be on the Committee School. Many, including veteran members, gained new insight into their colleagues.

4. **What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team: New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter**

National School Boards Association Public Advocacy: Communications 101 – Advice for new School Board Members

Tony provided the Google article for background and additional context, but it was very interesting to the group. Members considered the points that high performing teams are about everyone informally having the same amount of time to speak during meetings, as well as the critical importance of members feeling psychologically safe so they do not feel the need to “armor up” during discussions. Members who are good at intuitively knowing how others feel based on their tone of voice, expressions and other nonverbal cues (“social sensitivity”) also add to good teams. They know how to listen and are sensitive to fellow members’ feelings and needs.

Members shared their own experiences of being on the School Committee. Psychological safety can be very difficult when meetings are televised and social media scrutinizes an issue or a member’s comment. When asked, “How do you handle it?”, members suggested:

- Stay centered and stick to your core - remember that it is all for the kids.
- As long as we are tasked with being on the Committee, that is what is most important.

- Remember what we're doing and why we are doing it. If you know what you are doing is the right thing, you can weather the storm.
- Be gentle. Don't put on the armor and end up numb.
- Reaffirm each other. When a member is under siege, support them as a fellow member.

A key piece of teamwork is that no one person has the corner on wisdom and knowledge. You might be wrong. Listen more than opining on topics. Once a decision is made, it must be the will of the committee and members have to move on. It's ok to not have unanimous decisions all the time. The Committee should not be a rubberstamp for the superintendent. There are 12 members on our School Committee – 11 elected members and then the group's decision.

School Committee members are not responsible for fixing all of people's problems. It is crucial to refer people to the appropriate staff member(s). The Parent Communication Map is key. Becoming a member changes how others see you. If you are speaking with staff about your own child, start by saying, "I am here as a parent." Be very careful because words can be misinterpreted. Be very cautious about social media because individually, you are not the committee. You do not want to create the impression that you are speaking for the School Committee

The Committee discussed how to handle difficult inquiries and being sure that all the facts are known in order to make an informed decision or comment. Remember that for the parent, this is the first time they are going through something, even though as a committee member, you may have heard an issue many times. You should acknowledge that you hear the person and then tell them the limitations of what you can do.

Peter Light recommended Difficult Conversations by Stone, Patton and Heen. They advise to address the emotions, then the facts. Everyone brings their own lens to a situation and you can't get to the facts without understanding this. Keep talking with and listening to the other person until you see each other's perspective.

5. Characteristics of Effective School Committees

- THE BIG THREE: POLICY, BUDGET, SUPERINTENDENT
- The "Wild West"
- Center for Public Education: *Characteristics of Effective School Boards*

The School Committee is the Board of Directors of the School District. Coming to consensus is harder with a large committee like we have. Filters must be used to establish priorities for what is an urgent item vs an important item.

6. Continuing Team Development

- What is working well? What do you have to recognize and celebrate?
- What are the areas for further improvement (e.g., team functioning, relationship building, and effectiveness?)
- School Committee Goals: Focused discussion

Peter plans to meet with individual members over the summer and set up small group meetings during the year. Members were also encouraged to talk outside of the meetings and get to know each other better as individuals.

Members did the Characteristics of Effective School Boards ranking with very interesting results to Tony. He felt that on a number of questions, members were tough on themselves, or had significantly varying rankings on items. He urged the group to meet at another time to discuss these findings. He thought there would be more 4 or 5 ratings.

7. Summary Comments

- Change and Commitment

- Next Steps?

Peter gave the Cambridge website as a good example of how to begin to use data more effectively. They picked five areas of data that their district will watch this year. This is in an effort to focus and avoid “paralysis through analysis”. Tony agreed, adding that School Committee members and administrators can never lose sight of the big picture and the need for them to help students become “humans with more humanity”.

Members wanted to:

- Spend more time listening to the diverse ideas of each other and where they’re coming from.
- Build better relationships/friendships with members so they can be more supportive. This could include small gatherings or just a cup of coffee.
- Be more engaged.
- Be gentle on themselves and others
- Shift to sharing ideas in a more extroverted way
- Read everything to learn more about what is going on particularly as a new member
- Be more proactive and elaborate more about the reasoning of points being made.
- Pay more attention to what we want our schools to be doing
- Learn more about how the committee works together because they work better when they understand each other.

Due to a shortage of time, the protocols were not discussed but most members re-signed the document that they created last year. John Petersen asked that in the next discussion the School Committee embrace more of the totality of the communities that members represent.

The Superintendent made a few announcements. Members were invited to the November 5 Professional Learning Day. Meetings with members, including some with Chair Tessa McKinley, will be scheduled this summer and fall. Peter will offer a day or two of school tours as they did last fall for anyone who wants to go as a group. There was possible interest in a follow up workshop. Peter shared a draft page of the upcoming new newsletter page that will go out mid-August. This will be followed by quarterly newsletters, and monthly community coffees with Tessa. Lastly, Peter noted that Acton TV has agreed to cover the significant cost of the new audio equipment that will be installed in the Administration Building Auditorium. It is anticipated that School Committee meetings will start being held there regularly in October.

8. Statement of Warrants and Approval of Minutes of 6/13/19

John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and the minutes of June 13, 2019 were unanimously approved. The warrants were read by the Chair and signed by Committee members.

Angie Tso asked for clarification of how members were assigned to subcommittees for the new school year. This will be on the next meeting agenda.

Paul Murphy moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used:

- Agenda
- Humanistic View of Leadership: Building Capacity Working Through Others, Managing Environments
- What Google Learned from its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

- NSBA: Public Advocacy: Communications 101
- ABRSD Operating Protocols, voted 9/20/18
- ABRSD Parent Communication Map
- Warrants
- Draft minutes of June 13, 2019

Suggested Reading:

- Dare to Lead by Brene Brown
- Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most by D. Stone, B. Patton, S. Heen
- Meetings Matter: 8 Powerful Strategies for Remarkable Conversations by Paul Axtell

NEXT MEETINGS:

- ABRSC Meeting, August 6 at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library
- ABRSC Meeting, September 5 at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library
- ABRSC Executive Session Meeting re Negotiations, September 9 at 7:00 pm