



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

January 26, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

Administration Building Auditorium To view only: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

Approved Minutes

- Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Liz Fowlks, Ginny Kremer (7:05 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang, Rebecca Wilson
- Members Absent: Kyra Cook, Adam Klein
- Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino
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1. CALL TO ORDER (7:00)

The Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Amy Krishnamurthy in the absence of Chairperson Kyra Cook.

Members of the public were invited to watch the meeting online using Acton tv's youtube channel (found at the top of the agenda). Amy stated that the meeting was also being recorded and will be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

2. CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - *Amy Krishnamurthy*

Amy announced that she would not run again this year, having served for nine years.

a. Public Participation

John Petersen thanked Amy for her service. He urged citizens to consider running. Nomination papers are available until March 3 in Acton and March 24 in Boxborough.

b. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

- Leadership Coalition to Combat Hate & Bias Speech
 - Anyone interested in serving on this new leadership coalition, please submit your interest via [this survey link](#) by Feb 3rd.
- Principal Search Update
 - Searches are being conducted for Principals at the Conant, Douglas and Merriam Elementary Schools. We had a deep pool of applicants including a number of outstanding Assistant Principals and veteran Principals. Mr. Light hopes to announce decisions by Feb vacation.
- Finance Director Search Update

- A finalist has been selected and is expected to be on the agenda for the Feb 16th School Committee meeting.
- Community Coffees are: March 22 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual), April 26 at 8:30 a.m. (in person) and May 24 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)

3. GUESTS AND PRESENTATIONS

a. District Mathematics Update - Deborah Bookis, Jennifer Truslow, Dana Labb, Heather Haines, Kimberley Macey, Jessica Carabellese, Joanie Dean

- i. Baseline Student Learning Data-Aggregate & Disaggregated
Referring to slide 13, left column, Mr. Light commented that “we have a lot of work to do.” It was noted that some students may be in more than one group.

Comments from the Committee:

- Has there been any consideration to have High School blocks during the day when kids could get extra help without having to stay after school. Older students have not benefited from having MTSS when they were younger.
- Can we see iready data on a year by year basis to see if kids are achieving? Are we trying to understand the root causes of not achieving?
A: Testing is done 3 times a year and results are shared, including at spring conferences for all students. Michelle Shannon recommended that the team start looking at other factors that affect academics to see how they can address them too. This will require teachers to be flexible. Training has started.
- I-Ready results are available for the next year so teachers can reflect on it. MCAS isn't required for 8th grade, but it is for graduation.
- This monumental shift is appreciated. When a letter goes to families, it does not include how progress will specifically be monitored but there is a chance for families to communicate with the specialist. When a child has made effective progress and doesn't need the specialist, a letter is sent home. In math, specialists work using modules for 4 days and the 5th day is measurement. Parents/guardians may request that information. As a group, the specialists are working on how to use the data before it is shared.
- SEPAC co-chair Amanda Bailey expressed concern about how families of underperforming students who have not yet been identified as needing services, will be notified. Information is needed to make informed decisions.

- ii. Mathematics Teaching and Curriculum
Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics, by Peter Liljedahl is being read by our teachers as a group for discussion.

b. Professional Learning

Comments from the Committee:

- The Elementary schools' math program has always been very hands on. It is very exciting to hear what's happening now at the JH and HS. Students need to understand what they're doing instead of just memorizing things.

- A member noticed her 3rd grader’s dialogue about thinking about a problem and different ways to solve it.
- Do kids want to be tutored by their peers? Kids who are good at math are excited about it, but are the ones that need it?
- Why can’t the 9th grade pilot program be during the day? Some kids can’t stay after school. We do a lot of thinking about the kids that are good at school, but we need to pull the kids in that aren’t good at school. “Think outside the box to help those kids love it.” A: Teachers are keeping those students at the center of their work. Students are not being told to attend the afterschool peers tutoring. Students are choosing to go.
- Teachers are doing an amazing job helping students get the fundamental concepts, but math requires a lot of practice. Do students get enough homework and practice to understand the concepts? Heather Haines explained that we know it’s important to practice math, but it’s really important to have space between that practice. In 6th grade, students will have 3 or 4 questions on what they’ve worked on that day, followed by a few questions from previous lessons. This “spaced practice” is important. They can review a concept then if they need to.

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Budget Presentation - *Peter Light, Dave Verdolino, Marie Altieri*

i. FY24 Budget Presentation #2

1. Superintendent’s Preliminary Budget

1.1 Overview & adjustments since last meeting

The proposed FY24 Preliminary Budget is currently \$105.8M with an assessment to Acton of 2.99% and Boxborough of 5.33% and a gap of \$3M to balance (slides 99-101). Since Jan 12, several previously unanticipated retirements and staff currently on leave who will not return have allowed some cut items on the priority list to be restored, but not all. Went from 6.4 FTE to 1.4 FTE now to be cut.

Information was presented on the positions requested by the Committee at their previous meeting. The JH PE/Health Teacher position is a proposed cut due to a retirement. The health framework is being reviewed and public comment is expected this spring. This would be work for the Health teacher. The Senior Seminar is an alternative type of program, and very engaging for students. Cutting the coordinator would require redoing how students are assigned to internships and how good internships are found. Some of the coordinator position may be incorporated into the counselor position. The Science Curriculum Coordinator is a half time position affecting roughly 150 students.

Although a difficult decision, there has been a strategic move toward coaching positions the past few years, prioritizing who is working directly with students. There is a lot of content in science and it is very helpful to have a coordinator with all of that background. Another impact is the relationships that are built with community partners like the Garden Clubs, educational non-profits for grants, and higher education like Boston College's science STEM lab. Building those partnerships takes time. School Based Green Teams and site based social justice workshops are more examples. These will be a challenge to continue without a science coordinator.

1.2 Non-personnel & Capital Budget considerations

Dave Verdolino stated that issues crop up on an emergency basis in this area and that has affected what the Administration wanted to address. Access to Conant had to be fixed before school started, as well as a sinkhole on Leary Field. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will be reassessed for the next few years. A report is due in March.

Total Capital Projects Funding Sources through FY24 are estimated at \$2,700,000 (side 115). The CIP fund balance as of 6/30/23 is projected at \$1,300,000. Anticipated priority needs over the next 2-3 years is estimated at \$7,050,000 (slide 117). A life cycle analysis has been done at the High School and one is currently being done at the Parker Damon Building. The federal government has very significant programs for electrification rebate rewards and those are being watched.

Dave reviewed some of the various projects, including the Administration Building Roof Replacement, and ceiling replacement tiles at Conant due to asbestos. Both of these were not on our original CIP. (slide 117) We have received \$2M of ARPA funding from Acton. Boxborough committed \$375,000 but it has not come in yet. Mr. Light noted that the District has an additional \$3M bond from the \$75M bond issue three years ago that could be used. If an additional \$3M was bonded for a total \$6M all of the work could be addressed. Placeholders have been submitted to both towns for warrant articles on this. These would be high priority capital needs and involve the Capital and Debt Strategy subcommittees to start sharing this information with our stakeholders. We recommend keeping the current level of funding in our budget for capital. The report from VERITAS is

needed to confirm our thinking. The updated phone system should be added to this list as well although we need to be flexible on what we commit regarding capital until the report comes in. There are many pieces to this budget.

A member of the public spoke in favor of including these articles on the Town warrants because the bonding makes sense. He expressed concern that managing the District's one million square feet of buildings has become a part time job because expertise is needed to oversee all of these capital activities. More material was requested in the School Committee packet so some questions can be addressed.

- 1.3 All Day Kindergarten (ADK) - slide 121 - Marie Altieri
Students are now being enrolled for Fall Kindergarten and families have to decide in March if they will do ADK. It is hoped that FY24 tuition can be voted at the next meeting. Marie reminded the Committee of their many discussions on this topic and their commitment to eliminating tuition for ADK over the next several years. It was recommended that for next year, tuition be increased from \$1,800 to **\$2,250 for FY24 ADK tuition.** (slide 127). It is hoped that finances will improve during the next 5 years. The original plan called for a reduction of \$750,000 per year. This proposal for FY24 is reverting back to the original plan for FY24.

Comments from the Committee:

- As long as we charge tuition for ADK, we will also have a half day option for families who cannot, or don't wish to, pay for all day. What is the impact on programs of that when half the kids get sent home in the middle of the day? How long will we offer half day K, no matter how small the pool gets? A: We moved to a scholarship program so any children that need assistance can attend. Those who elect not to do ADK are choosing not to. We currently have only 11 students in half day K.
- A member advocated for keeping tuition at \$1,800. Does everyone who applies get a scholarship? A: Scholarship information is part of the K presentation, on the application and in emails, and shared multiple times a year. Scholarships were given to everyone who requested it and staff continue to reach out to K families to be sure they know about it.
- Are we offering a full day program, or only part of it? What really matters, is if it's really only a few students that want half day, a

member wants to be sure we're not denying kids. A: We are offering part of a full day. We are close.

- What is being done about funding ADK? A: Ginny Kremer and others have presented to our legislators about this. Mr. Light added that AB probably wouldn't get enough from the state to go tuition free. Our best bet is to partner up with other districts. Other communities are now doing needs assessment for **universal** PreK.
- A member disliked charging more next year. It's "hard to support that we are going back on our word." Marie Altieri replied that tuition could stay at \$1,800 for another year, but longer term it is a problem. There is about \$184,000 in the tuition account that rolls forward. If tuition stays at \$1,800, that account balance would go down. The Administration will bring a couple of financial models over the next 5 - 7 years for the Committee to discuss at the next meeting. This will include a model of if we waive tuition. The state is sitting on a large surplus and revenue projections are being done right now so that will also impact the budget. There's also the question of how the millionaires' tax will impact education. It was noted that the cost of transporting the half day students home is negligible.

A vote on ADK tuition must be taken by the Feb 16 meeting.

1.4 Information about selected reductions

Members were asked to let the Superintendent know if they needed additional information on anything for the next meeting.

b. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- i. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz (1/13/23)*
Discussions continue regarding building community connections to promote understanding of the school budget and bringing our community together around anti-hate speech.
- ii. Policy - *Ginny Kremer (1/17/23)*
Members continue to discuss the charging for facilities policy.
- iii. Budget - *Amy Krishnamurthy (1/23/23) - as presented.*
- iv. Negotiations - *Amy Krishnamurthy (1/24/23)*
Discussion is ongoing. Members appreciate the collaborative relationship with the ABEA. An executive session may be held at the next meeting.

c. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Amy Krishnamurthy*

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 1/12/23
- ii. Recommendation to Approve Bus Lease Agreement and Addendum

between N.E.T. Leasing Corp. and ABRSD FY24-28
Liz Fowlks moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the consent agenda.

- d. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomethal seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo).

FYI

- School Resource Officer Subcommittee
- 2023-2024 Academic Calendar

NEXT MEETINGS: February 2 & February 16 ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium

5. ADJOURN

Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously
VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC meeting at 10:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Mathematics memo from D. Bookis 1/20/23, FY24 Budget Information memo - School Committee Requests for Further Discussion from P. Light 1/20/23, Draft Meeting Minutes from 1/12/23 from B. Petr, Request for Bus Lease Bld Award from D. Verdolino 1/20/23, Warrant Memo from D. Verdolino 1/20/23, Acton-Boxborough Regional School Resource Officer Subcommittee Members, 2023-2024 ABRSD Academic Calendar voted 1/12/23, District Mathematics Presentation Slides, FY24 Budget Presentation #2 Slides