



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Training & Workshop

November 17, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

Followed by Executive Session at 8:30 p.m.

Administration Building Room #3

APPROVED OPEN MINUTES

- Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (6:50 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang (6:40 p.m.), Rebecca Wilson
- Members Absent: Ben Bloomenthal
- Others: Marie Altieri, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino, Jim Hardy - MA Association of School Committees (MASC)
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1. Call to Order

Chairperson Kyra Cook called the ABRSC to order at 6:34 p.m.

2. Chairperson's Welcome - *Kyra Cook*

3. Subcommittee/Liaison Updates

a. Policy Subcommittee Update - *Ginny Kremer*

A policy regarding Class Size Guidelines in the Junior and Senior High Schools is being considered. Principals Joanie Dean and Jim Marcotte shared their thoughts and it is obvious that there are "many layers" to this discussion due to how the upper grades are structured.

b. Legislative Liaison Activities – *Ginny Kremer*

Ginny has been working hard trying to connect with our legislators regarding financial assistance for All Day Kindergarten without much success. She spoke with DESE members at the recent MASC conference and is hoping that there may be a bit of a window now with the incoming new politicians. This is an opportune time and she is following up. Andrew Schwartz is also assisting in this.

c. MASC Conference

Members who attended the recent MASS/MASC Conference found it very valuable. There is a lot to learn by connecting with members from other communities. Ginny urged the Committee to make attendance at this annual event a priority next year.

4. Superintendent Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light reported that the student who was recently injured in a car accident is slowing improving. The annual Veterans' Breakfast coordinated by Mary Price Maddox was very well done. Sixteen local senior citizens enjoyed a tour of the High School, lunch and a discussion with students in an effort to share what is happening in our schools with residents who no longer have children in the

system. The gathering was very much appreciated by all. Mr. Light met with the Council on Aging to see how we can host more seniors in our schools. A help desk involving students is being considered. One of the Superintendent's goals is to help the schools bring value to the community.

5. **Budget Training & Workshop with Jim Hardy, MASC Field Director**

Dave Verdolino introduced Jim Hardy for a discussion of "Roles and Responsibilities of School Committees in their Communities: Budget Development, Implementation, and Monitoring". They have done several financial workshops together over the years.

Jim emphasized the need for School Committee members to understand what municipal finance is all about regarding the schools. He suggested that members should never be told, "You don't need to know that." and that they need to ask questions. His comments included:

- All budget deliberations must be done in public. This is required by Open Meeting Law but transparency is key because it builds trust and confidence in decisions made.
- The public does not have the right to speak at all budget meetings. The Chair runs the meetings and must recognize speakers. Public Hearings are specifically for public input.
- The amount of detail in a proposed budget is determined by what members are comfortable with, and what is ultimately needed for the budget to be approved.
- Municipal officials cannot cut a school budget. Town Meeting can cut it by not approving the assessment, but they cannot decide how cuts will be made. They can make recommendations but they are not binding.
- MA Education Reform Law differentiates roles – Administration = Superintendent, Policy = School Committee, and Budget = Policy.
- The budget sets priorities by funding them (or not). The budget supports personnel policy including: Collective Bargaining, Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination, and Employment Process.
- Per MGL Ch.71, Sec.34, the School Committee is responsible for "reviewing and approving budgets for public education in the district".
- Per MGL Ch.41, Sec. 45, all bills must be approved by the School Committee prior to payment. Members should look for abnormalities when signing warrants and ask questions if something doesn't look typical.
- Because a school district cannot go into deficit spending, a school budget cannot be exactly planned. Budgeting within 1% is being very efficient.

Members discussed the importance of working with the local boards and committees to educate people before the Town Meetings begin when it comes to passing the budget. Jim recommended that School Committees post that they are attending Town Meeting so they can vote during the meeting, if needed. In a regional district, all School Committee members, or at least a quorum should attend all of the Town Meetings in the regional towns in case a discussion and vote is needed at a meeting.

Members discussed how to get the budget message out to the community. Communications must be easy to understand and delivered to where people are getting their news, to be effective. School messages do not reach everyone because only about 20% of voters have school-age children. Currently there are four generations of voters – baby boomers (like letters and

cards), Gen x (like to be called), Millennials and Gen Z (like social media). Successful communication is flexible enough to meet all of these delivery methods. It was noted that to be on a facebook list does not create a meeting. The Open Meeting Law comes into play when there is a quorum of a body discussing something under the body's jurisdiction. A member can comment on a discussion until it refers to something under that member's jurisdiction. Sharing information is different from sharing an opinion. Deliberation (regarding something under a body's jurisdiction) involves an opinion.

Given that the Committee will be dealing with expenses for next year that go way over the budget amount, it was asked if there a difference between how to proceed when times are good compared to when there are not enough funds. Jim replying that discussing people's jobs in public is hard. With a finite amount of money to spend, the focus should be on making logical decisions based on the priorities. Make sure the information is available to the public so people understand how a Committee got to the decisions. Being very transparent and open is key. Be sure all of the budget subcommittee information gets out to the whole School Committee. Inconsistent answers lead to credibility issues. It's very important that all members stay on the message.

Dave Verdolino shared slides showing a gap in next year's budget of \$3.4 - 3.5M. This translates to approximately 20-30 certified staff. There is just not enough revenue to keep up with the expenses for next year. The Committee will also need to discuss the use of reserves. The typical budget process will not work this year. The Administration is looking at administrators, consolidations, and any possible areas for savings. The Committee needs to decide what number to target for the Acton assessment. Acton's reserves are at 5% and have risen every year. The District's E&D has been going down. It was stated that over the last five years, Acton has using around \$1M and replenishing \$1.2 M a year. Mr. Light stressed that a \$3.5M cut is really challenging. Members will need to think about what level of risk do they want to assume by using more E&D. This has to be matched with what the Town of Acton is able to do. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) will be kept informed that the District will need to use more reserves than in the past.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Budget Guidelines - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*

Members considered providing numbers to target the budget increase for FY24 between X% and X%, as well as attempt to target the use of E&D reserves to \$X, taking into account the specific budget guidelines discussed at the previous School Committee meeting.

Referring to slides 6 & 7 from the 11/1/22 School Committee meeting, "What Does that Mean for FY24 Finances?" Adam Klein reviewed how an assessment increase would translate to the Acton assessment and Boxborough assessments, as well as how a budget increase would translate to the numbers. A member asked whether the number should be financially sustainable or educationally sustainable. The member thought it should be Financially but Adam responded that this would not be educationally sustainable because it doesn't cover the known fixed cost increases. Dave Verdolino added that regarding sustainability, the questions really are, "When are you going to have an override?" and "How many years' worth of reserves are in the bank?"

Members discussed reserves. It was suggested that there is a psychological impact on staff to be considered. It may be better to say we stay at \$1.25M E&D use now and leave wiggle room. Members discussed whether a budget target was the way to go, and as numbers get solid it could be decided about reserve use. A member reminded the Committee that a goal is to make the budget as transparent to the community as possible.

While the Superintendent suggested that members should consider using \$1.25M for initial use of E&D, Adam Klein (Budget Subcommittee Chair) and Kyra Cook felt it did not need to be in the guidelines. There was a willingness to use more than usual, but also a need to understand more before members were ready to commit to a number.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the FY24 Budget Guidelines as amended to include that the ABRSC would like to see the District target the Acton town assessment to 3%.

- b. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 11-01-22 - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*

Liz Fowks moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the minutes of 11-01-22.

- c. Blanchard Memorial Elementary School Playground Revolving Account - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light fully supports a multi-year goal for this type of initiative. Other schools may want to establish similar revolving accounts. It would not be appropriate for donations to be solicited and then when it is brought up to the School Committee, it not be approved for acceptance. Typically use for the funding would be specified when requested, similar to ABSAF donations. Adam Klein moved, Rebeccah Wilson seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the Blanchard School Playground Revolving Account.

- d. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*

Adam Klein moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo).

6. Executive Session

Kyra Cook stated the need for an executive session to be convened under

- MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee. She stated that the School Committee would not return to Open Meeting.

Adam Klein moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to enter Executive Session for the reason stated at 9:26 p.m. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Fowlks, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Schwartz, Wang, Wilson)

FYI

- David Verdolino Notice of Intention to Retire
- R.J. Grey Junior High Musical Oliver Jr., 12/01/22-12/04/22
- Boxborough Tree Lighting, 12/03/22 at 4:30 pm

- Community Coffee (virtual), 01/18/23 at 7:00 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Roles and Responsibilities of School Committees in their Communities: Budget Development, Implementation, and Monitoring Presentation Slides (J. Hardy), Budget Workshop Slides (D. Verdolino), Proposed ABRSC FY24 Budget Guidelines (A Klein), Draft ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 11/1/22 (B. Petr), Letter re Establishing a Blanchard Revolving Account from D. Labb to P. Light 11/8/22, Warrants Memo (D Verdolino), Notice of Intention to Retire from D. Verdolino 11/17/22, Oliver Musical Flyer, Boxborough Tree Lighting Flyer

NEXT MEETINGS: December 1 & December 15, ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium