



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

January 12, 2023 Executive Session at 6:15 p.m. / Open Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

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

APPROVED OPEN MINUTES

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (7:09 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang, Rebeccah Wilson

Members Absent: Ben Bloomenthal

Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. CALL TO ORDER - EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order at 6:18 p.m. by Chairperson Kyra Cook. She stated that the Open Meeting (not the executive session) would be recorded by Acton TV.

Kyra stated the need to meet in Executive Session pursuant to 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 added that the Committee expected to return to open session at approximately 7:00.

Ginny Kremer made the motion, it was seconded by Tessa McKinley and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** to meet in Executive Session pursuant to 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. (YES: Cook, Fowlks, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Schwartz, Wang, Wilson)

RETURN TO OPEN MEETING at 7:09 p.m.

2. CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - *Kyra Cook*

Members of the public who wished to watch the meeting online were invited to use Acton TV's youtube channel. It was announced that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

Kyra announced that she would not be seeking re-election to the School Committee. She has been honored to serve and encouraged others to get involved in this important work. Nomination papers in Acton are now available.

- a. ABRHS Student Representative Update - *Harshini Magesh, Molly Norris, Diksha Mhatre, Julia Zhou*

Comments from the reps included:

- Wifi at the High School has significantly improved since last year, however it is still spotty in some areas of the building. This will improve as equipment at the Boardwalk Campus is fully installed and other items are turned over to the HS.
- Educational videos are sometimes blocked on youtube due to key words they include. Please reevaluate the firewall being used.
- Clubs have become much more popular this year since covid - great to see.
- Wellness week was wonderful, including the alpacas, dogs and cats that visited.
- Community service awards night was great. Students appreciated everyone coming out and supporting them as they give back to the community.
- ABSEJ club members will be volunteering at the MLK Day program at Beth Elohim. Tanesha Sullivan, President of the Boston Branch of the NAACP is speaking. All are invited to attend.

- b. Public Participation

Noting that some scientists clearly knew in the 70s about the climate change effects of their work yet they continued to proceed, a speaker hoped that our schools are equipping students to have the moral clarity they need to make good decisions.

- c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Awards Night for 602 students
- School Committee Recognition Month - members thanked for their service
- FY24 Budget Update - will be a challenging budget process
- Cartwheel Care Webinar for Acton and Boxborough Families - Jan 25 at 7 p.m.
 - This will be a 5 part series on youth mental health.
- Kindergarten Schedule 2023-2024 - Parent meeting 1/17 at 7 p.m. via zoom

4. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Recommendation to Appoint Deputy Superintendent - *Peter Light, Andrew Shen*
VOTE - *Peter Light*

As previously reported, Marie Altieri has announced her retirement and although "she is irreplaceable", Mr. Light recommended Andrew Shen for the position. He noted Andrew's high level of support from our staff, parents and families. Andrew appreciates working with Marie and the principals over the past 15 years and the valuable experience it has given him. He thanked the Superintendent for his support. Several Committee members strongly supported this appointment. They noted Andrew's professional acumen, sense of humor, ability to connect with students and parents. He always knows who the students are and really understands this population.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to appoint Andrew Shen as the Deputy Superintendent of Schools effective July 1, 2023 pending successful contract negotiations with the Superintendent of Schools.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Budget Presentation - *Peter Light*

i. FY24 Budget Presentation #1 - Goals of the meeting:

- Review the timeline and process for budget adoption
- Provide detailed information about FY24 Proposed District Budget
 - Revenues and Budget Drivers
 - Strategies to Balance Budget
 - Proposed Personnel Changes
 - Proposed All Day Kindergarten Plan and Tuition
- Solicit feedback about budget approach to inform next steps

The preliminary budget vote is scheduled for February 16 and final vote is scheduled for March 16. Votes on the assessments will take place at the Acton and Boxborough Annual Town Meetings in May.

1. Superintendent's Preliminary Budget

1.1 Proposed Staffing (new positions, reductions, initiatives)

1.2 Preliminary Projection of Assessments and Reserves

District goals and initiatives were reviewed as well as budget priorities and School Committee guidelines. Guidance was previously given to target the Acton assessment at a 3.0% increase and target the overall budget increase at 2.5%. The Town of Acton is at its levy limit and is constrained in its ability to increase revenue. As of 1/12/23, the total FY24 proposed preliminary budget is \$105,747,586. This is a 2.7% increase. A level FY23 services plus estimated inflation budget would be \$107,269,013 for a 4.25% increase.

FY24 Preliminary Budget Request (slide 51):

Est. cost of FY23 services \$107.3M

Identified Budget Additions + 1.3

Revenue Adjustments (0.2)

Non-personnel adjustments (0.9)

Personnel adjustments (1.8)

FY24 Preliminary Budget \$105.8M

This preliminary budget leaves a \$2.8M gap that must be closed.

This FY24 preliminary budget results in a 2.77% budget increase with assessment increases (totaling 3.37%) of:

- 2.99% to Acton and 5.33% to Boxborough
- Proposed variety of cost saving strategies

- Proposed personnel changes result in NET reduction of 20.4 FTE resulting from + 2.0 FTE (EL Teachers) - 22.4 FTE
- Proposed revision to All Day Kindergarten plan results in a tuition increase for FY24 and longer duration of plan to tuition free ADK

The strategies incorporated into this budget still result in a \$560K gap in the ALG model. (slide 82)

Mr. Light asked for feedback on the strategies, including any other information members would like to see or questions that they have. This will be used to update the budget version for the next meeting. Staff will also be asked for input. He acknowledged that these are very hard choices and significant reductions and hopes that not all will be needed.

The meeting on January 26 will include a discussion of All Day Kindergarten and budget line item detail. The Capital budget will be reviewed. A consultant has been going through our buildings to determine work that needs to be done. Our phone system needs to be updated for several thousand dollars. Some roofs need maintenance asap and are a liability. The Capital and Debt Strategy subcommittees will be involved. We might reallocate some of the Building Committee funding that was not needed to take care of some of these important capital items to avoid issuing more bonds.

Comments from the Committee included:

- Ginny Kremer shared a fact sheet regarding ADK from science based earlyeducationforall.org. She stated that charging tuition for kids to go to public schools is penny wise, pound foolish.
- Three members asked for more info on the proposal to reduce two library media librarians. Strategy? This is involved in the time on learning requirements. Libraries need professional staff.
- More info regarding the ramifications of losing a counselor at the High School. What will the caseloads look like?
- Cutting the tv/radio staff and guidance are concerning because they affect some of our most vulnerable High School students. These are areas we should be going in the other direction on.
- Cutting a first grade section could traumatize a child if they had to be transferred to another school.
- More info was requested on the High School counselor and the curriculum coordinators being cut.
- What are the strategies for how we can cover what we're losing in the cut of 22.4 FTE?
- A member doesn't think the Committee can "go back" regarding ADK tuition. Would like a multitude of options.

- What happens when we're reducing reserves?
- What does it mean if we open up taking choice students, particularly at the secondary level? This could offset some cuts.
- If these cuts happen, how will the Administration make it work? A member advocated for spending more E&D.
- Cut anything that's not personnel, not student facing, even if it's temporary to get us through this financial issue.

A member of the public thanked the Administration for "a painful presentation" and hopes to have an explicit discussion about capital at the next meeting. Some capital should be in progress all the time. ABEA President and Merriam parent, Mike Balulescu, acknowledged that Committee members are volunteers and want to serve our students, but wanted to "raise the alarm" regarding what we are collectively doing to our school district. We have failed to fully fund our schools and we are now reaping the consequences. It is especially taking a personal toll on the teachers. For the second year in a row we have had to cut staff. Every cut takes away educational opportunities for our students. We need to hire and especially retain our staff. All of us need to do better.

2. Budget Subcommittee Report - *Adam Klein (included in above)*

b. FY24 School Calendar - Second Read - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*

A First Read of the proposed Calendar was done at the last meeting on Dec 15th. Mr. Light worked with Mike Balulescu on two new proposed versions, B and C. It was decided that version A from the previous meeting had some inaccuracies and when corrected, ended on June 20 with two half days in that week making it not viable. Versions B and C both end on June 14 and while teachers liked both, version C was slightly preferred because it was a full work week. Working parents may also prefer it for that reason as well. It was agreed to keep a Professional Development Day in November. A member asked if the two weekend holidays could be listed. The Superintendent would consider it, although only no school days are currently listed.

Liz Fowlks moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve calendar C.

c. Subcommittee and Member Reports

i. School Resource Officer Subcommittee

1. Announcement of Chairperson and members

At the previous meeting the Committee approved the creation of this new subcommittee per policy **BDE**. Mr. Light reported that based on the survey, he is confirming volunteers' interest and will bring names to the next meeting. The School Committee confirmed that Adam Klein would be chair and

Rebecca Wilson and Amy Krishnamurthy would serve as members. It was agreed that it is important to have a diverse group of members.

- ii. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz (12/16/22)*
Members met to discuss tactics and activities that can be utilized to build community connections to promote understanding of the upcoming district budget. Additionally the Subcommittee will collaborate and support the district's efforts to bring the community together around anti-hate speech discussions.
 - iii. Policy - *Ginny Kremer (12/20/22)*
 1. Class Size Guideline Policy, File IIBA-Second Read- **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
A First Read of this proposed revision was done on 12/1/22. Because more specific guidelines for secondary classes could cause unforeseen consequences regarding programming and students at this time, it was decided after much discussion by the subcommittee to keep the policy more general.

Ginny Kremer moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the revision as contained in the packet.
 - iv. Negotiations - *Kyra Cook (01/05/23)*
An executive session was held prior to the meeting to update the Committee.
- d. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
 - i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 12/15/22
Adam Klein moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the minutes of 12/15/22.
 - e. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
Liz Fowlks moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the warrants. See memo for motion.
Adam Klein abstained due to a reimbursement.

FYI

- Community Coffee (virtual), January 18, 2023
- Student Enrollment, 1/3/23
- Annual Town Election Deadlines - Peter announced and asked that members let the community know if they plan to run again when they know.

6. ADJOURN

Adam Klein moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

agenda, agenda item summary pages, Recommendation to Appoint A. Shen as Deputy Superintendent memo from P. Light 1/6/23, Andrew Shen resume, Proposed FY24 school calendars, School Resource Officer Committee - Volunteer Responses from P. Light 1/9/23, Elementary Class Size Guidelines Policy IIBA Revision for Second Read/Vote, Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 12/15/22 from B. Petr, Warrants Memo from D. Verdolino 1/9/23, Monthly Student Enrollment 1/3/23, 2023 Acton and Boxborough Election Calendars, Budget Presentation Slides from P. Light/D. Verdolino/M. Altieri 1/12/23, Full-Day Kindergarten Fact Sheet by Early Education for All updated Aug 2019

NEXT MEETINGS: January 26 & February 2 ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium