



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

October 6, 2022 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

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

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy,
Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Rebecca Wilson

Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Liz Fowlks, Yebin Wang

Others: Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, David Verdolino

1. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order by Chairwoman Kyra Cook at 7:03 p.m.

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

2. Chairperson's Welcome - *Kyra Cook*

Kyra spoke about how the beginning of the school year is dedicated to establishing relationships, routines, expectations and curriculum. Rapport and comfort develop as well. The School Committee mirrors this process. Last month members met three times including workshops on goal setting and union negotiations. This month, three meetings will be held again including an important budget strategy collaboration with the Selectboards and Finance Committees of our towns. A public hearing will be held during the Dec 1st School Committee meeting regarding the District's School Resource Officer Program. The public is welcome to attend and share their views of whether this program should continue. Kyra thanked the community for their trust and patience so the Committee could give this significant decision the dedicated time it deserves.

a. Public Participation - *none*

b. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Noting that there were more students than adults in the audience, Mr. Light welcomed three students from a political science class at the High School who were observing, as well as the three student reps and another student from the junior high.

The Grand Opening of the Boardwalk Campus is next Saturday morning for the entire community. That afternoon is a Diwali celebration at Sargent Library. On the 16th at Leary Field the Field Hockey team is sponsoring an annual cancer awareness fundraiser. Boosters and vaccines are now widely available and he encouraged everyone to get one.

3. Guests & Presentations

- a. ABR High School Representative Update - Rohan Ravindran, Harshini Magesh, Molly Norris

The reps will report at the first School Committee meeting each month and will share some student perspective on current events at the High School, per policy JIB - Student Involvement In Decision-Making.

Comments included:

- The firewall setup at the High School can still be an issue. It sometimes prevents adding material to a project. It also restricts personal emails, which can be an issue when doing college applications.
- Advisories are now comprised of mixed grades with different results. Many students feel it takes their mind off of difficult classes and allows for interaction with kids. Some kids don't like it though because they don't have as much in common with students in different grades. Also this year, everyone is doing the same exact thing, which can be monotonous. It used to be a time to relax, but now it can feel too formal. Let students brainstorm activities they'd like to do.
- As a leader in a program that connects new students with an upper classman who can help guide them, Rohan shared his concern about students who did not speak english. A lot of time was spent trying to connect with kids who could translate and it felt "unacceptable" for the new students. "How would the kids get through a whole year like this?". He proposed a welcome center as a place for new students to go to to get started and transition. He also thought an Ambassador Program like the current Peer Mentoring for upperclassmen, could really benefit ELL students and improve their experience.

Members discussed the lack of consistent cell phone service in the High School, which has improved. The High School has two issues - wifi access and cell service. Because the supply chain crisis hit when we were preparing to open the new building, some of the access points had to be taken out of Douglas and Gates. Cell service will never be great because this part of Acton does not have good service. The Boardwalk campus has some landlines for emergencies. The District is considering teaming up with our municipal colleagues and contacting verizon to see how the Town and schools can get some help with these issues. It was reported that during the High School lockdown, the biggest complaint was that parents couldn't reach their kids.

- b. Special Education Update - *Director of Special Education Jen Truslow*
- i. In-District Programs Overview/Financial Impact on Out Of District Costs
 - ii. Co-Teaching
 - iii. Disproportionality/240 Grant
 - iv. Budget Update - *Dave Verdolino*

Members appreciated the overview. The 14% tuition increase for FY24 (slide 16) is concerning and is due to a new large "workforce stability factor" per Dave Verdolino. We would expect circuit breaker funds to go up proportionally but it is a reimbursement program and the District wouldn't get the money until FY25. With the state having a lot of cash on hand right now, perhaps they could accelerate the extraordinary relief program to provide same year

reimbursement, but it is not being discussed at this time. Mr. Light noted that the increase in tuition should not be an issue if it is what kids need.

- v. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) - Amanda Bailey, Kara Lafferty
- Amanda and Kara presented on select 2021-2022 SEPAC survey findings and 2022-2023 priorities. Members appreciated seeing the survey data. There was a discussion about private therapies and equitable access for kids who supplement services (slide 14) and whether it is funded personally or through a grant. Many people don't know that laws require insurance companies to pay for some of this. It is important to recognize that it may not mean the kids are not getting the right services from the schools. Amanda agreed more information in this area would be good. A member made the point that regarding inclusion, it is important to tie this to bullying. The more kids can be included, the less isolated they are and less bullied. It is better for all kids to be together. Amanda appreciated district efforts on co-teaching regarding inclusion.

4. New Business

- a. District Goals 2022-2023 (First Read) - *Peter Light*
(vote is expected at the Oct 20 SC meeting)
- b. Superintendent's Goals 2022-2023 (First Read) - *Peter Light*
(vote is expected at the Oct 20 SC meeting)

This is all part of the Superintendent Evaluation process. It is the first year that Mr. Light is doing both sets of goals together. He added "Belonging" to the center of the District Strategy diagram this Fall (slide 2) because all of the strategy is really about belonging. This is a central theme regarding what is important to us as a district. Regarding Goal 2 (slide 6), typical growth vs. stretch growth was discussed. Data is being used because we have to measure progress toward these goals. Slide 8 outlined other initiatives and planning that we need to prepare students for jobs of the future. Curriculum is being built to address these opportunities.

Mr. Light proposed four Superintendent Goals (slide 9). He asked for feedback so he can consider making adjustments before asking the Committee to vote the goals at the next meeting. The overarching goals are being presented. More detail is in the packet.

Comments from the Committee included:

- Linking the Superintendent goals to the District goals is great.
- The professional practice goal is key to creating strong relationships with our community.
- Focusing on the STEAM initiative is great, as well as reconsidering the High School course levels (slide 8). A group of teachers will be looking at student data on these all year to measure success. This year's freshman environmental science class is an example. Prerequisites were eliminated for any level that a student wanted to take.

- STEAM visioning is excellent. There is a “real crunch” finding qualified engineer types for some of these jobs. Mr. Light said that our community has always had a strong focus on these classes but what is changing are the jobs that employees need to be trained to do. He wants to get students involved to see how excited they are and about what. He wants to elevate students’ voices.
- Profile of a Graduate is more than just academics alone, it’s about the whole person. How do we encourage more than that? What non academic activities can be part of the school? Creativity is being brought into so many businesses and students need to be aware of this. Mr. Light cautioned that we should not talk about either being academic or fun. We want to continue to build our schools’ cultures so kids feel connected to our schools. We need to continue to have fun activities for all our kids and families. The #1 factor to close the achievement gap are families and #2 are the teachers. Engagement through fun activities and being sure families know what is happening in school is essential. It was appreciated that art was added.
- An English degree includes all of the STEAM skills!
- High School classes should be more engaging. Many kids have to wait until they’re a junior to take anything really interesting. Freshmen have to take all the boring required classes. We need more fun math classes! Mr. Light agreed. Kids are much more connected to content if they feel it will engage them with something interesting. Teaching chemistry or biology via a forensic science class is an example. Kids would love that. They do however need a solid foundational base of knowledge. That is a goal of the district.

Adam Klein voiced concern that it might be too much to have four big goals and several initiatives to focus on. His fear was that, like last year, the Superintendent was being asked to do too much. His feedback to Mr. Light and the Committee is that the goals are ambitious, and the other things are important but there are certain things that have to be done, such as the High School accreditation. Secondly, measurable outcomes are needed. Outcomes for Goal 3 are tough to measure to know if we’re reaching them. It is hard to make decisions without data. It was appreciated that the conversation was happening now, at the early stage. Mr. Light responded that the administration is implementing certain things, like surveys to measure students’ and educators’ sense of belonging. Each student is also being asked if they feel they have a trusted adult in the school. He felt that the goals all have measurable action steps. The priorities are target areas and he has thought about who is involved “in the heavy lifting” of some of the work. There is “lifting” for everyone on a couple of things, and “lifting” for some on others. The majority of the work is years in the making, starting with an elementary focus.

When asked if the Superintendent should edit down the goals, Adam responded that clearly Mr. Light has thought this through. When the Committee does his evaluation, however, they will need evidence and there is a lot going on. Adam doesn’t want Committee members to say, “but we don’t have a STEAM program yet”. From an evaluator standpoint, Adam wants to know clearly what the Superintendent wants to do. Tessa respected Adam’s criticism, but belonging has a lot to do with the other goals (slide 4). She added that cultural response has been talked about for years and if members have to evaluate on it, she wants to see real progress in that area.

Mr. Light concluded that “There isn’t a silver bullet to solve any of this.” This is work that is done every year and you have to keep building on it. This is why the words “continue” and “refine” are used so often. Everything involved in our goals and strategy is actually culturally responsive practice. All work is about equity and inclusion.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS (8:30)

a. Consent Agenda/Action Items - VOTE - Kyra Cook

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 09/22/22
- ii. Approval of Donation of 1500 acrylic paint canvases (\$6240) and 750 blue light glasses (\$2250) from Krospoint, Inc.
- iii. Approval of \$5,000 Donation check to Community Education Summer Day Program from Danny’s Place - HOLD
- iv. Annual Reauthorization of Official JH Organized Activities

Kyra read the agenda items. Amy Krishnamurthy requested that iii. Approval of Donation from Danny’s Place be held from the consent agenda.

Adam Klein moved, Tessa McKinley seconded, and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda as amended.

Because Amy is on the Danny’s Place Board, she would abstain from voting on this item. Adam congratulated the Community Education Summer Day Program staff for their great work given this donation and another significant one approved last month.

Adam Klein moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve of the donation from Danny’s Place with gratitude. Amy Krishnamurthy abstained.

b. Subcommittee and Member Reports

Ben Bloomenthal reported that the Pool Renaming survey responses were due by Oct 4. Of the 663 submissions, 88% were in favor of naming the High School pool after former Coach Jeff Johnson. Several people were opposed to naming spaces/buildings after individuals. The School Committee will be asked to vote on this on Oct 20.

Adam Klein attended the September SEPAC meeting and reported much discussion about the Memorandum of Understanding re School Resource Officers. Kyra reminded everyone that they are welcome to attend the Public Hearing meeting on Dec 1st.

Andrew Schwartz reported on the recent Health Insurance Trust (HIT) meeting.

c. 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)

FYI

- Monthly Student Enrollment Report, 09/01/22 - highlighted
- Boardwalk Campus Open House, 10/15/2022

- DiwaliFest 2022, 10/15/2022
- Community Coffee (virtual), 10/26/22 8:30 a.m.

6. **Adjourn**

Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Special Education Update slides, AB SEPAC Presentation slides, District and Superintendent's Goals 2022-2023 slides, ABRSD District Strategy 2021-2026 Mid-Year Update: Annual District Improvement Plan - School Year 2022-2023 (P. Light), Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 9/22/22, Donation check from Danny's Place, Annual Authorization of Student Activity Funds/R.J. Grey JHS memo (9/27/22, J. Marcotte), Warrant memo, Monthly Enrollment 9/14/22, Grand Opening of the Boardwalk Campus Flyer, Festival of Lights DiwaliFest Flyer

NEXT MEETINGS: October 20 & November 1 ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium