



## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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### Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

December 1, 2022 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

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

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### APPROVED MINUTES

- Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks (9:10 p.m.), Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang, Rebeccah Wilson
- Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah
- Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino
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1. Call to Order (7:00)  
The ABRSC was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Kyra Cook. She stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at [actontv.org](http://actontv.org).
2. Chairperson's Welcome - *Kyra Cook*
  - a. ABRHS Student Representative Update - Molly Norris, Diksha Mhatre, Julia Zhou  
A Homecoming dance is coming up which people are excited about because events like this have not happened for a long time. On the day before Thanksgiving a fun show was put on for students. The reps hope that other fun events will be offered to create more class spirit in the school.
  - b. Public Participation  
A parent expressed concern and anger that the book, *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson is found in our High School. She feels the sexual content is disturbing and inappropriate for our school and read an excerpt from page 172. The title is included on a list of Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2021 that is hanging in a freshman english class. She asked the Superintendent what the steps are to have the book removed and was told it would take 30 days.

A parent watched the discussion of the recent lockdown at the meeting on 9/22/22. Some people were worried and upset about how it was handled. Some felt important details were left out of the information shared with parents. The speaker urged the Administration to choose their words carefully and not accuse people of being racists.

A third speaker expressed concern over the contents of two videos shown at the High School. She expressed that she thought the videos contained “sexual” content. Principal Dean and Superintendent Light reviewed the videos and agreed that because they were someone’s opinion, they should not have been shown to students. The parent asked why teachers can show any content they want without guardrails. A student in the audience expressed anger over what she considered “blatant homophobia” in the speaker’s comments. Another speaker stated that this isn’t about being gay or straight. It has to do with some of the things mentioned are disturbing (such as anal sex) and have nothing to do with being gay or heterosexual.

c. Superintendent’s Update - *Peter Light*

The School Committee has a policy around curriculum material concerns and there are procedures when a concern is brought up. The Administration does not pull resources out until the process is followed and a decision is made. He will keep the Committee informed on this request and the reasoning behind any decision. Literature should not be an emergency. Our kids have access to all sorts of information on google. The Administration has to follow the process when materials are challenged.

Mr. Light shared that Deputy Superintendent Marie Altieri has announced her retirement at the end of the school year. Her 15 years of service to the AB staff and students is commendable, as well as her many years of dedication on all kinds of boards in the community. He congratulated Marie and thanked her for all that she has done.

3. New Business

a. School Resource Officer (SRO) Program - *Peter Light*

i. Program Overview/Data

Kyra explained that there were several options for this program. The Committee can choose to end the SRO program, accept the new Memorandum of Understanding between the District and Police Department, or refer the issue to the policy subcommittee to study and propose changes for the Committee to consider. Kyra welcomed public comment at this meeting but would restrict speakers to 90 seconds due to the large number of people attending the meeting.

Mr. Light referred to Brenee Brown’s revised definition of “empathy” as the ability to listen deeply to someone’s experiences... and then believe them. He cautioned that people tend to extrapolate their own experiences to those of others and we should resist that urge as much as possible. He stressed that continuing the SRO program or not does need to be a binary decision. We can choose to use this opportunity to listen to the various voices we are hearing either in support of the program, or who have had adverse experiences with the program, and use this information to create the program we believe best meets the needs of our community. Offering several suggestions for how urgent action can be taken while also recommending that AB *maintain* the SRO

program, Mr. Light stated that “having SROs who are trained in working with youth and adolescents provides a significant value to our schools which should at least be given an opportunity to be re-envisioned in a way that creates more equitable and just schools for all of our students.” (See the Superintendent’s comments attached.)

ii. Discussion with Acton Police - Deputy Chief Jim Cogan and former SRO Sgt Keith Campbell

Deputy Chief Jim Cogan has been on the Acton force for 35 years, and began as a Youth Officer involved in the DARE program. Sgt Keith Campbell worked in the SRO Program from 2004 - 2021 and loved the opportunity. They shared their experiences in our schools. Comments included:

- We are a security entity. Schools have become targets. We work with school staff to assist students during a crisis.
- The SRO is there when school staff is not available and kids need support.
- Learning opportunities - A DARE officer helps teachers come up with lesson plans that fit AB better because they know the students and the community. This includes topics like dating violence, what healthy relationships look like, and cyberbullying.
- In 2008 a restorative justice program was adopted to keep kids out of court and avoid criminal charges when appropriate. This is something that Sgt Campbell is most proud of. Teenagers make bad decisions and adults need to work with them. SROs work in collaboration with the school, not to enforce the police work on the school.
- Sgt Campbell has had over 1,000 hours of youth training and is well prepared to handle an issue with a young person. (All officers have Crisis Intervention Training, but SROs have more and specialize in young people in crisis.) He is cognizant of how some kids feel seeing an officer in the hall. From 7am - 11pm, an SRO is currently available if a call comes in.

Questions from the Committee included:

- Are there any female officers? There are four and they are trying to hire more but not many females apply.
- What about social services? Over the past 10 years, they worked with a shared clinician but they have now hired a full time clinician to work with the department due to the increased need.
- Do officers wear body cameras? No. Acton PD does not have them currently.
- Why do we not have more records of SROs’ work? The school records did not include all the data that people are now interested in. Mr. Light said that now that they know it is important, the District is looking into it.
- What is the SRO organizational structure within the police force? Sgt Krug oversees the SROs. A senior SRO is assigned where he is most comfortable, then others are assigned where needed.

- What changes have been made since the two officers resigned recently? Deputy Chief Cogan stated that the Department takes full responsibility for what occurred, and has dealt with it. This has made supervisors much more aware and critical about the importance of proper oversight.
- This was a significant issue and going forward, what internal controls have been put in place to ensure similar events won't happen again? Policies have been reviewed and officers have been trained in the policies. There is better oversight regarding supervision of the officers, although no one can guarantee that nothing will ever happen.
- If an SRO reached out to Boxborough police for assistance at Blanchard, would the SRO be in charge, or the police? The Sgt would defer to his SRO skills and knowledge of the situation.
- Do you have a list of ways to improve the SRO program? Sgt Campbell said yes, they work for the community and input is always vital. They want to offer support to the school. They welcome meeting to discuss this type of thing.
- What is the process if something goes wrong at the High School, and the SRO isn't available, who responds, particularly around sexual assault? It depends on the nature of the issue. They do have 4 female officers in the department.
- If we choose not to continue the program, what might change regarding the Acton Police and the schools? There would be some changes but not sure at this time. They also work with Victor School, Colebrook High School and local daycares and preschools.
- What training specifically have you received on race-based bias? Can you speak to the trust gap? Sgt Campbell did a 40 hour race bias training course and several boosters through Middlesex Partnership for Youth. He understands his role as an officer and the impact it can have on students. He described the routine of how he walks through specific school building areas twice a day and looks for things that are out of place or unusual. While a student may feel they are being watched, there are areas that the SROs consistently monitor. Kyra noted that Sgt Campbell was mentioned a number of times in the DEI Report as someone with positive rapport.
- How many cases does an SRO handle? This varies year to year and can't be predicted. The statistics could be provided if needed. Approximately 80% of the cases that are criminal in nature, are attempted to be addressed using restorative justice.

iii. Public Comment - (limited to 1.5 minutes by the Chair)

Comments included:

- In support of the program. Generally, appears to have been a successful partnership with our police department. Could be an excellent opportunity for community building.
- Finding a police presence in our schools shocked this parent when they moved to town. Sgt Campbell and Dep Chief Cogan are exceptions and even with the

training, we recently had two “bad ones”. Shouldn’t all officers have this training for dealing with children?

- We’re all here for student wellness and safety, and most trust the collective wisdom. If we take away this SRO resource, on whom is that work going to be placed? Does the School District have the room for it? Please be thoughtful when pulling a resource so we don’t crush our teachers and students in crisis.
- The students who felt watched were not white students. Patrol officers get familiar with people in town too. If we don’t have SROs, the school campus will not be patrolled. We need to define high standards for the SRO program.
- This process needs to include students, staff, community and anonymous input. We shouldn’t be in a rush regarding this program. Obtain the data from Sgt Campbell. (Kyra noted that this meeting was announced months ago.)
- SROs are increasingly involved in school discipline. Officers are looked for regarding code of conduct questions and disciplinary action. SROs are not trained for this. We should add more mental health professionals to our staff.
- A speaker who works in restorative justice found our SROs were very adept at dealing with serious issues. The DEI report has excellent recommendations. Start a dialogue with students and ask what is happening and ways they can express their thoughts. Everyone needs a deep understanding of this.
- Our SROs can only do their job if there is trust between them and students. That trust might be broken. It is the School Committee’s responsibility to get student feedback to restore that trust. Maybe pause this program and see what can be done?
- People want to feel safe. We have not seen data showing that police keep kids safer. The speaker sent slides to the School Committee and urged them to think outside the box.
- Trust has been broken with students of color. We need to use caution regarding ways to improve the program - vetting, training and accountability should be considered.
- Take more time and share some data. Ask for examples of good things that came out of Sgt Campbell’s 17 years in the program. Show the value of the SROs with positive examples. Keep the program.
- The Committee was thanked for “starting this process with integrity”. The DEI subcommittee worked for over a year studying this and presented a roadmap to build trust. The speaker was on the committee for restorative justice and sees the good that comes from it. You can’t silo the Police Department and build community. The revised MOU puts forth shared common principles that are important to consider. Please look at the DEI roadmap and MOU carefully.

The Committee confirmed that no vote would be taken at this meeting. Mr. Light stated that there is not a deadline for signing the MOU. The current MOU with the Police is in effect until a new one is signed. Andrew Shen, Director of Special Projects, will be

tasked with obtaining anonymous data. While some emails were received by the Committee, none were from students. All were encouraged to fill out the new survey.

The point was made that there is no funding to be reappropriated to hire non-police officers if we eliminate the SRO program. Members generally do not want SRO work to fall on teachers' shoulders, per the earlier speaker. SRO funding is 100% from the town of Acton, not the school. If we want to think about replacing them with new staff we would have to pay for it. Mr. Light added that the schools and police would find a way to work together for students, no matter what.

After much discussion, and recognizing the need to act expeditiously but also the need to collect more info and consider the DEI recommendations, the Committee came to consensus around asking a subcommittee to further study the program and return with recommendations to the full committee at their next meeting. The committee intends to formally vote to appoint this subcommittee at its next meeting on December 15, 2022. In the meantime, Mr. Light would like to start working on student discipline codes.

A student in the audience stated that it is really important to have officers in the schools because they support students and they're there to keep them safe. Knowing the officers are in the school is a comfort and is for everyone's well being.

b. October 1 Enrollment & Class Size Update - *Marie Altieri, Maryann Young, Joanie Dean, James Marcotte*

Marie, Maryann, Jim and Joanie presented their updates. (see slides) Total K-12 enrollment is down 8% over the past four years. K-12 enrollment vs. projection was down 34 elementary students, up 1 JH student, and down 11 HS students for a total of down 44 students from the FY23 projection. AB has an increase in multilingual learners, students who were born here but whose parents do not speak english. In response to a question about the policy subcommittee considering recommending larger High School class sizes, Joanie said that refiguring class schedules could impact some supports and electives that can be offered. A difference between High School and elementary class sizes is that a High School teacher has 120 students a day but elementary teachers have a classroom of about 20 students.

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

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

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 11/17/22
- ii. Donation of \$2,000 to Athletics from Special Olympics for Unified Basketball Program

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

b. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- i. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz*
- ii. Policy - *Ginny Kremer*

1. Class Size Policy, File IIBA - First Read

Jim Marcotte and Joanie Dean's presentations informed the subcommittee's discussion of the upper grade level class sizes. It's very complicated. The proposed revision to this policy is offered understanding that there will be a lot of variations due to the levels of secondary classes. The Administration is balancing what's best for students given budget resources and is looking for general guidance on class sizes. They felt it should be consistent with grades 4-6. The older students are, the more variety of classes are offered and sometimes the disparity of learning needs grows wider. Comments to Ginny.

- c. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*  
Adam Klein moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously **VOTED**: to approve the warrants (see memo)

FYI

- Case Collaborative Report 1 to SC and copy of Board Responsibilities and Timeline - Peter serves on this Board. When asked if CASE is in good financial standing, Peter replied yes. The reserves they have received exceed what they can.
- Community Coffee (virtual), January 18, 2023

5. Adjourn

At 10:15 p.m. Adam Klein moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: To adjourn the ABRSC meeting.

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

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: Agenda, Agenda Item Summary Sheets, School Resource Officer Program History and Data Memo (P. Light, 11/28/22), Required Updates to School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding Memo (P. Light, 8/22/22), Summary of the DEI Family Advisory Findings Memo (J. Faber, 8/16/22), Memorandum of Understanding for School Resources Officers Memo (C. Brunt, Counsel for ABRSD, 8/17/22), Summary of the DEI Family Advisory findings (6/1/21), Memorandum of Understanding Between Acton Boxborough Regional School District and the Acton Police Department Regarding the School Resource Officer Program (signed 9/4/18), 2022 School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding Between \_\_\_\_\_Public Schools and \_\_\_\_\_Police Department, K-12 Enrollment and Class Size presentation slides (12/1/22), Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 11/17/22 (B. Petr), Gift Letter from Special Olympics to ABRHS, Proposed Revision to Elementary Class Size Guidelines policy, File IIBA (First Read), Warrant memo, CASE

Collaborative Report 1, Handout brought to meeting by member of the public (This Book is Gay),  
Handout brought to meeting by member of the public re website

### **Superintendent's Comments from 12.1.22 regarding School Resource Officer (SRO) Program**

I am not quite sure, but I believe it was Brenee Brown who posed a revised definition of empathy. We have long thought of empathy as the ability to listen to someone and then walk in their shoes. We now know this is impossible and that our perceptions of the world are deeply personal and shaped by the experiences we have had. In the new definition of empathy, there is a recognition of this and the new definition is posited as: The ability to listen deeply to someone's experiences... and then believe them. We tend to extrapolate our own experiences to those of others and we should resist that urge as much as possible.

The debate around the mascot was not a testament to our ability to be empathetic and believe that individuals can have different ways they experience the world. In hindsight, we spent more time trying to disprove how others said they experienced the world than listening to them and believing their stories. I hope as we move forward, we can listen to the experiences of others fully and not spend our time and energy working on a rebuttal instead of listening to what they have to say. I hope discussion of this important topic is just that: a community dialog that values the different perspectives shared, which then recognizes that the committee members, as elected by our towns, have a responsibility to make a decision that embraces not only community input, but their own core values and above all, the needs of all of our students.

From the public comments that have come in so far via email, we can clearly hear that different individuals have different experiences with schools and school discipline, as well as police and resource officers. I would encourage us tonight to focus on listening to the various experiences with an open mind and heart and understand these important ideas: that some individuals have had adverse experiences in our schools and in their lives with police, and that others have benefited greatly from their experiences in our schools and with the SRO program. Everyone we hear from has an important perspective to hear and consider without inherent judgment because their perspective is different from our own.

I provided a memorandum in the packet with an overview of the program. I will be upfront that our data about school-police interactions is limited. I don't want to revisit the memo tonight other than to answer any questions you have as that document stands on its own. That said, it doesn't fully capture the wide range of experiences different students and families have had with our schools or the SRO program. The comments and public commentary speak far better to that than I can.

What I do hope to draw attention to is that the decision to either have or not have an SRO program is complicated and there are many different perspectives to consider. Inevitably, based on previous



comments at school committee meetings, I believe you will ask for my recommendation on this program and I would like to share a few thoughts.

1. There is no absolute way to prevent violence, including having an SRO. We have seen time and time again that any individual who carries a weapon and is committed to doing harm will do so. I don't think this alone is the rationale for keeping SROs.
2. In any industry or sector, there are individuals whose behaviors put at risk the credibility of the entire organization. This certainly happened with two of our SROs. They are no longer with us. There are things to learn from this for how we can have guardrails to prevent future behaviors, and we simultaneously need to be judicious in how we use this information to judge the rest of the organization.
3. Having officers with specific training around the issues youth and adolescents face as well as an interest in serving them combined with preexisting relationships with school staff, administrators and students provides value. There are going to be instances where officers respond to schools regardless of whether or not we have an SRO program, and it is of value to have a trained SRO respond instead of leaving the response to chance.
4. Our school district has low credibility right now with our Black community in particular, and justifiably so: We continue to hear from Black students and families about feeling targeted, disproportionately disciplined or being watched. As a white male, I have never had these experiences with either schools or police, but that doesn't mean they don't happen to our Black students. Our data over time supports that we do disproportionately discipline students of color, students who are economically disadvantaged or who have disabilities. This is neither good nor acceptable, and it is no wonder we have diminished credibility with people from these groups. I also think that the frustration with the SRO program is a symptom of the underlying issue and not the root cause. Resource officers are the end of the disciplinary pipeline, but we need to look at the whole referral process from the start to understand why more students of color end up along this path.

I think this begs the question: "what should we do about this and when?" I'll start by saying this is a school committee deliberation *with* community input for a reason: this is bigger than any one individual's decision and I respect all of the viewpoints on this issue. Here is my recommendation:

This does need to be a binary decision. We do not either have to maintain the program as is or eliminate it. We can also choose to use the opportunity we have now to listen to the various voices we are hearing either in support of the program, or who have had adverse experiences with the program and use this information to create the program we believe meets the needs of our community. I would offer a few suggestions for how we can take urgent action while also recommending that we *maintain* the SRO program:

1. Use the policy subcommittee to review all discipline policies, including those that govern student handbooks and use your policies as instruments to shape the type of schools we want to have. At a minimum, update policies to require trauma sensitive and restorative justice approaches to discipline which are now consistent with Massachusetts law Ch 71 S. 37H ¾.

Require schools to develop and take specific actions to reduce and eliminate disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Have schools develop strategies including those just mentioned to reduce the use of suspension as a tool for student discipline. Ensure these procedures provide clear guardrails for school-police interactions. Hold us as administrators accountable for returning this spring or summer with revised disciplinary procedures in our handbooks that are aligned with this vision.

2. Through either the policy subcommittee or an ad hoc committee, use the new statewide SRO MOU as a *starting point* to develop an SRO program that is responsive to the variety of concerns we have heard. The new MOU requires a process for community input and public concerns to be addressed, annual evaluation of the SROs to be done jointly by the Superintendent and Chief of Police, and protections for students and families with disabilities. Use these items as a starting point to add language that creates an effective MOU, and charge the Superintendent and Chief of Police with developing operating protocols consistent with this vision and which are publicly available. You can also consider expanding the requirement that we have for professional staff to complete anti-bias coursework to SROs who work with our students and provide our SROs with access to coursework that the district provides to educators around trauma informed and restorative justice.
3. Require the school district to annually or bi-annually report disciplinary data publicly to the school committee. Require data to be disaggregated and ask questions if and when there are disproportionate outcomes for students. In policy or procedure, require schools to maintain accurate records of referrals to the SRO program so that we can better evaluate the program over time. Have us consider ways we can track not only referrals to the program, but the outcomes from those referrals.
4. Set expectations for a realistic and urgent timeline to review the SRO program again within the next several years to see if the changes we are making have the desired impact. If not, consider taking additional actions at that time, including then considering the elimination of the program.

I understand that some in the community may feel that these steps do not go far enough or should have been taken long ago, and I respect that point of view. I do however feel that having SROs who are trained in working with youth and adolescents provides a significant value to our schools which should at least be given an opportunity to be re-envisioned in a way that creates more equitable and just schools for all of our students.