

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Administration Building Auditorium

15 Charter Road, Acton

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

September 22, 2022

7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Tessa McKinley, Yebin Wang, Rebeccah Wilson

Members Absent: Amy Krishnamurthy, Andrew Schwartz

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

1. **Call to Order (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Kyra Cook.

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**

Please see the Chair's statement (attached) regarding last week's lockdown at the High School and the structure planned for the evening's meeting.

a. **Public Participation**

Steve Ballard appreciated Kyra's comments. He urged a strong vote of no confidence in the schools' resource officer program, noting issues in both towns with some officers. He asked for a report at the next Committee meeting.

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

Mr. Light congratulated Conant students and staff on receiving a 2022 National Blue Ribbon School award for exemplary high performance. He thanked the School Committee and staff for their work on the district policy and procedures on Digital Schools. We are highlighted in a new author's book, "Who's Raising the Kids" by Susan Linn. It is great to have in-person Open Houses back now. The Grand Opening of the Boardwalk Campus is Oct 15 at 9:30 a.m. A ceremony will be followed by tours for the public. All are welcome. The next scheduled School Committee presentation will be regarding Special Education on Oct 6.

3. **Guests & Presentations**

Mr. Light explained that this year, the district structured social emotional learning supports around a tiered system of support. Snapshots of tiered supports being offered at the elementary schools, junior high and high school were presented to help the committee and community understand the work being done involving the elementary Responsive Classroom programming, junior and senior high school advisory programs,

Trauma Informed Schools and a new program, Cartwheel Care, that is being designed to improve student access to mental health support.

a. Social Emotional Learning Overview - Heather Stouch, Elem Psychology Chair

i. *Responsive Classroom (RC) - Jill Krysil, Blanchard Teacher, RC Trainer*

There is a lot of excitement among teachers about sharing these techniques. New staff members are urged to pick one or two pieces to start with as it can be overwhelming to try too many at once. In response to a question, Mr. Light said that accountability regarding social emotional learning can be hard to measure, and can sometimes defeat the purpose. Survey patterns will start to be twice a year. This is about how our staff, students and families experience school. It is critical how we approach this work with our staff. We have to be sure there's not a negative value associated with this effort.

A Committee member who is a teacher added that in her own RC classroom, she has kids who don't know others' names, but they do know how to greet them or ask what their name is. The tenor of the classroom changes when everyone recognizes that they know something about their classmates and it builds their community. She suggested that "it is a tiny bit that isn't really measurable but makes a huge difference."

ii. *Advisory Programs*

*Jr High Counselor Jess Eagle and Teacher Peter Cavanaugh
High School Teachers Nikki Jeannotte and Darren Gwin*

The High School has been doing advisories for a long time in various ways. This year's goal is to create a cohesive community.

iii. *Trauma Sensitive Schools - Lesley University (LIFT), Joe Restuccia*

Many people can talk about trauma, but this program talks about "what to do". In response to a question about whether this includes "racism trauma", Joe said that systemic trauma includes racism, gender bias, sexual preference and more. All students need to feel safe and supported. Our staff has shown significant interest in the academic courses being offered. A second course has been set up and a wait list exists for others who want to take it.

iv. *Cartwheel Care - Joe English, Dr. Juliana Chen*

This new organization is passionate about collaborative community care work and trying to address the extensive wait for therapists. They are very excited about this partnership with AB and other schools. Mr. Light thanked Cartwheel for their flexibility in working with us. There was a plan in place and they reacted very quickly during last week's incident.

4. New Business

a. Discussion of Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Incident on September 14, 2022

Mr. Light began by saying that it had been an extraordinarily challenging week. He described the facts of the shelter in place incident, with as much detail as he knew and could appropriately share. He said that actions taken by school administrators to ensure students are safe during an incident can also result in a sense of less safety for some students. That was the impact of what happened last week. Thinking about the students involved, their families, as well as other members of the Black community at AB, he added, "We are so deeply sorry that the actions we took had such an impact on, especially our students and families, but also the broader community." He stressed that while the information available to them necessitated taking action, there were no weapons found at school and police have determined that the report was not founded. Some details cannot be shared because they could reveal students' identities. Mr. Light read an email that was sent out to families to have a current shared understanding. He added that the district will continue to learn all that they can about what happened and will take steps if they find it was racially motivated.

Comments from the Committee included:

- Once it was understood that the students named were all students of color, how was that factored into the administration's actions? Mr. Light replied that when Principal Dean and he learned that they were students of color, they discussed it and agreed that they could not ignore the information they had at that time. Decisions had to be made in minutes and given that the information involved a weapon, they had to act.
- What weapons were carried onto our school campus and why? Were there Acton police with assault rifles on campus? Mr. Light replied that no Acton police had more than the standard issue gun. There were no assault weapons on Acton police officers. A Boxborough officer may have had a different weapon when they were called for back up.
- Are you trying to find out who the student reporter was? Mr. Light said that our anonymous reporting form is a google form set up by our Ed Tech department in an anonymous way so students will provide information. Our edtech staff have tried unsuccessfully to obtain the IP address where the tip came from. Law enforcement could potentially find it if they were pursuing this as a criminal case but it is not a simple process.
- It is possible that the student did what they are told to do - if you see something, say something. It doesn't necessarily mean ill intent on the student's part. Mr. Light said that they don't believe there was malicious intent on the part of the reporter.
- As a member of the Jewish community, what concrete steps are being taken to address the trauma that these Black students and families experienced? Mr. Light replied that counselors have set up a trusted adult for each student involved if the student wants to talk with them. Students were not called to the office because it would highlight their identity. Counseling staff reached out to them. The Leadership Academy's Michelle Shannon has met with our Black Student Union over the past year. She is coming tomorrow to meet them again. The administration has also reached out to Cartwheel Care to set up services if any of our students

want assistance outside the school. DEI Director Jen Faber is reaching out to community organizations to bring together stakeholders. As far as what the district is doing to eliminate hate in our community, Mr. Light responded that that is a long process.

- Why aren't our police or our DEI Director here? There appears to be a rush to hand over control of this to police. Mr. Light appreciated the feeling in the statement made but some of the facts were not accurate. If there is a report that there may be a gun in school, administrators have to involve the police. School administrators are constantly balancing risk. We have to make sure that things are physically safe and then consider emotional safety.
- Was there a chance for de-escalation, or taking a pause before acting? Mr. Light replied that when something like this happens, the top priority is that the Superintendent is responsible for the lives of thousands of people. It may lead down paths that will not be perfect, like in this case.
- No kid should go to school in fear of losing his life. No parent should drop their kid off at school in fear that they will not return. But also, no kid should go to school and fear they will be racially profiled. That is losing your dignity and fear of belonging.
- A member appreciated the emails from other ethnic groups but felt that some blatantly ignored that six Black kids in the district were profiled because someone reported it. She questioned why all minorities can't support each other and be united. "This is not a Black thing or Chinese or Indian thing. It's horrible to tell the Black community to just deal with it by themselves." She stated that this wasn't about AB making a mistake, it was about these kids and their families being racially profiled.
- Several members appreciated how the Superintendent handled the incident as it unfolded.
- In response to people rushing to make judgements, a member shared that she tells her second graders to wait until they hear the whole story, the whole message. She is waiting for the other people that need to speak and provide more details and facts, before she will speak up.
- A member extended sympathies to our Black families who continue to experience racism in our community. It is important to hear from those directly affected. He thanked the Chairperson for taking the time to do that at tonight's meeting.

Kyra thanked Mr. Light for the direct address to the Black community that he made at the meeting. She read a statement about her worry for her son and other young Black people. "We can only confront the truth if we say it out loud: among some, AB has a reputation for being not fully inclusive and welcoming of Black kids." She noted that good work is being done to build trust, do justice and be better but it will take years to make this a fully safe place for all kids. She advocated for a "breaking of the cycle of making things go away after something significant happens" and instead asked for a sustained, consistent effort of relationship-building. She was grateful that this work has now begun.

Comments from the Public included:

1. A Black veteran of Iraq realized that she was safer there than when she was in school in NY from being shot by police. The six boys were in danger last Wednesday. Every time she tells her child's school of an issue, she worries about what will happen.
2. A High School parent described last Wednesday as "a day from hell". She was thankful that nothing happened but it was a very bad feeling to know it could be your child who was targeted. Anonymous tips will come up again, but was the intensity of the response appropriate? Do we need to look further? She hoped for a better response in the future.
3. Concern is what is the systemic thing that will prevent this from happening again. What happened with the information that the boys were all Black? It seemed like only after an uproar was it investigated. The district needs to hold itself accountable if this comes up again and initiate a "racial justice muscle" to know when to take appropriate action to investigate. All communications had effusive gratitude to the police and students who responded to the shelter in place order. Words matter. We need to know whose perspectives we are elevating when we communicate.
4. Earlier sentiments were echoed. This is not easy for the Superintendent and it is happening all over the country. We need to reach out as a community and provide extra support.
5. Anti-Blackness in particular has a connection with police and policing. She hopes there is an appreciation for the collective experience of being marginalized and that Black students and families, especially Black men will experience this differently. Her experience at AB has shown her disproportionate disciplinary actions in this regard, and she feels not a lot is changing. She appreciated Kyra and Evelyn's emotional labor that they are doing and forced to do by way of their positions on the committee and as community members.
6. "My heart is broken." A mother described how her daughter always tries to quietly do the right thing at AB, but is not being received for how she really is. She first heard the news from her daughter, not from the district. She didn't believe her daughter when she said all of the students were Black. This is how we reinforce macro level micro aggression. Parents deserve more rapid communication.
7. How do we prevent this in the future? Why do we have an anonymous tip line? This encourages cowardly behavior and allows kids to do this again. If you have a complaint, you should tell someone and identify yourself.
8. A mother came as an ethnic minority to support her Black brothers and sisters. All she hears is the white point of view. Six lives were impacted by this. There are different kinds of death - of reputation, of community, in the Black community when something like this happens. The fear of a threat coming from six Black boys is from a "whiteness" point of view. This decisionmaking point of view needs to be de-centered.
9. A mother was confused about why things escalated as they did. The FBI has a school shooter threat perspective and they find that schools that respond to every threat can be very dangerous because they lead to overreacting or underreacting.

Evelyn Abayah-Issah stated that she doesn't think anyone is blaming the Administration for the actions that were taken. What people are asking for is an acknowledgement that six Black kids experienced violence and trauma, even though there was no evidence that anyone had a weapon in the school that day.

Members of the public were encouraged to email the School Committee if they wish to share any additional comments.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Consent Agenda/Action Items

- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 09/08/22 - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
- ii. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 09/15/22 - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
- iii. Recommendation to Approve assuming responsibility and oversight for the planning and development of the junior high school technology education program. - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook* *HOLD by Adam.*

Adam Klein requested that the third item be held from the consent agenda.

Ginny Kremer moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda as amended.

Adam Klein held the Junior High technology program item due to the strong sentiment at the previous meeting to keep the current staff. Marie Atleri confirmed that a Memorandum of Agreement with the two teachers has been prepared and is ready to be signed if the recommendation is approved.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve assuming responsibility and oversight for the planning and development of the junior high school technology education program.

b. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- i. The Pool Renaming Subcommittee met and their survey is out. Members will reconvene when responses are in. A recommendation may be ready for consideration by the School Committee at their Oct 20th meeting.
- ii. The Budget Subcommittee met to discuss a preliminary budget following a quick update on where we are regarding FY23 and the budget calendar. Members asked for confirmation of next Spring's Annual Town Meeting dates.

c. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *K. Cook*

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

Mr. Light reminded members to register for the annual November MASC conference if they planned to attend. ABRSD was invited to do two presentations - Adam Klein is discussing our building project and Mr. Light will also be presenting.

Kyra highlighted the Diwali celebration that will take place on Oct 15, after the Boardwalk Campus Grand Opening.

7. Adjourn

Tessa McKinley moved, Rebeccah Wilson seconded it was unanimously,
VOTED to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Welcome Statement read by K. Cook, Social Emotional Learning Presentation Slides (Overview, Responsive Classroom, Advisory Programs - Jr High and High School, Trauma Sensitive Schools - Lesley University, Cartwheel Care), High School Update Email sent to ABRSD Families on 9/16/22 from Superintendent Light, Draft Minutes of ABRSC meetings on 9/8/22 and 9/15/22, Warrant Memo

NEXT MEETINGS: October 6 & October 20 ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium

This evening, we meet as a community one week after our regional high school was put on lockdown for two hours because of an anonymously reported allegation of danger to our student body. The timeline and details of what unfolded last Wednesday, September 14th, will be addressed later in this meeting. There has been communication from the Administration, accusations thrown around on Facebook, and a standout in the streets. There have also been hours of phone calls, meetings, coffees, and time spent with community members who have simple questions that must be answered by those decision makers who took part in the events.

As Chair, I hold the agenda. I am purposefully making space for the grief and frustration of the community that experienced an extra layer of trauma during last week's lockdown. Black families in our town make up a mere 4% of the community. That leaves us vulnerable to being unseen and underheard in situations like this--because we're told the situation is complex, that nothing is simple and binary, and we have to wait until all the details are sussed out in investigation. I will make more remarks on this later, but I want to be clear: today's meeting purposefully makes room to hear from our neighbors--hopefully many of our Black neighbors, and then those who are caring allies as well. Today, you will be seen and heard.

There are some who would like to attach this moment to our broader, necessary, and yes, adjacent, conversation about the School Resource Officer contract. I believe there is a time for lament, airing, and truth-telling and *then* there is a time for change, work, and executing on new ideas. We *will* have a full and transparent discussion about SROs and the memorandum of understanding for them. I believe that it is imperative that this Committee conduct that discussion separately from this event.

At the beginning of this meeting, we will talk about the infrastructures of social-emotional learning programs that have been implemented in our district to support all of our students. It is important to note that *all* of our students have endured a traumatic event over the last three years and it shows. The presentations you are about to see were scheduled weeks ago and, frankly, they are appropriately timed. Please watch and listen with care.

Afterward, I will open up our meeting to talk about last week's events. There will be ground rules and I will explain them when we get to that portion of the meeting.

For now, I thank you for coming to this meeting.

Kyra Cook
Chairwoman's Welcome
ABRSC Meeting 9/22/22