

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

October 15, 2020

To attend open meeting: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505>

7:00 p.m.

To call in: 312 626 6799

Live streaming: <http://actontv.org/on-demand/livestream/government>

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Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum (7:05 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: none

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, 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 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley. She noted that the meeting was being conducted both in person and remotely via a Zoom webinar and that members Kyra Cook, Amy Krishnamurthy and Yebin Wang would be participating via zoom. The following members were in the auditorium with Tessa: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, John Petersen, Nora Shine and Angie Tso. Diane Baum would be coming momentarily. Per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The meeting was taped by Acton TV.

2. **Chairperson's Welcome – Tessa McKinley**

*See attached statement read by the Chairperson regarding the disappointing tone that the discussion of the AB Colonial mascot has taken. Community members were reminded to "be kind".*

3. **Public Participation – none (for items not included on the agenda only)**

4. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light – See the Mascot discussion.**

5. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

a. **Approval of Meeting Minutes of 10/1/20 – VOTE – Tessa McKinley**

John Petersen moved, Evelyn Abayaah-Issah seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** to approve the minutes of October 1, 2020 as written. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

b. **Discussion Regarding Request to Retire the AB Colonial Mascot - Possible VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

Tessa reviewed the process that has taken place since the students' request was made to the School Committee in July. She thanked everyone who shared their thoughts and opinions on this question, noting that almost 700 emails were

received by the School Committee over the past month. Two petitions were circulated (one for retiring the mascot, one against) with over 2,000 signatures each, although only one was formally presented to the School Committee. Tessa reported the updated numbers but emphasized that the numbers were not a count of votes, and they do not reflect the depth of so many of the comments.

Two possible motions were provided for the Committee's consideration:

- Move to retire the AB Colonial Mascot, with the understanding that programs and new purchases made by the District will no longer bear the name "Colonials", but changes to existing capital items such uniforms, scoreboards and other items will be undertaken as time and funding permit.
- Move to keep the AB Colonial Mascot.

These were provided to remind members what the purpose of the discussion was, not to restrict what they may ultimately decide. The "Naming District Facilities" policy FF gives the School Committee the responsibility for approving facility and program names. Step 1 is to decide if something should be named or renamed. Step 2 is to form a screening committee to find a new name. Tessa clarified that by saying "retire the mascot", it is meant not just that the figure will be retired, but also the idea that the Colonials represents our schools.

High School Principal Larry Dorey began. Although he has been a "Colonial" for 27 years and has tremendous pride in our traditions and respect for our alumni who graduated as AB Colonials, in his opinion, the mascot should represent the students and staff today and it should be viewed in context of the world we live in today. To be an inclusive learning community, where every individual feels valued, to have a mascot where any student or staff does not feel valued, is unacceptable, in his opinion. See his statement attached.

Superintendent Peter Light followed. He was focusing on trying to hear the voices of those who hold a different perspective, and wondered how these perspectives may change if more education about our local history was provided. He noted the intellectual and emotional connection that people have to the Colonial mascot, and pointed out that 20 years ago our student body was over 95% white, while now we are just over 50% white. See his statement attached.

School Committee members shared their thoughts. Some read prepared statements (attached). Other comments included:

- Initially, I wondered why we should be talking about this now with the pandemic and everything else happening. Listening to the students' presentation and reading all of the emails however, made me very proud and moved by their personal experiences.
- Our students are experiencing their own personal history and we have to honor that. They feel or felt ignored, and not able to be part of the community that they want to be and that is not right.

- Members were struck by the hostility directed at the students who brought up the petition.
- When a marginalized group speaks up and then faces increasing hostility, a member couldn't imagine telling them that the colonial name that brings them such pain, has to stay and they need to wait. We cannot say that we don't value their pain enough to change the name.
- Several members felt it would be better to propose a replacement mascot at the same time. Retiring the Colonial and leaving no mascot until a decision is made on a new one could be detrimental for students.
- I. Kendi's How Not to be an Anti-Racist talks about how people evolve in their thinking. Children should be educated that what they believe as young people can change. Applying labels to groups of people prevents deep and thoughtful discussions. People are all individuals.

Several comments were made suggesting that more time be spent gathering input and discussing the mascot to gain a better understanding of the two sides. It was hoped that this would avoid more conflict. Other members strongly disagreed. The School Committee has done a lot of anti-bias training via SEED. Tessa stated that while the intent of the mascot and its representation of the Colonial to honor those who came before us is valuable, the impact on many of the students and staff is very negative. In her opinion, no more conversation can change that. "As a white privileged person", Tessa does not want to ask them to explain this further.

Members were very concerned about the divisiveness in the community. Evelyn Abayaah-Issah shared how initially she was open to learning more about the Colonial mascot when the ABSEJ request was made. She wanted constructive criticism, but instead she found that many people are not open to understanding others' trials and experiences of trying to be included. People have become very hurtful and she questioned whether continuing the conversation would do any good. Several members thanked Evelyn for her honesty and agreed that it is time to vote on the issue and for the community to heal. It is essential that people listen to each other and understand that they are expressing pain and discomfort. Kyra Cook summed it up saying, "Let's make this decision and do the hard right thing. Honor the choice."

Mr. Light summarized the process that he and Larry Dorey have discussed. The first step is to decide if the colonial should be retired per School Committee policy. The two processes (whether to retire and finding a new mascot) should not be mixed. If it is agreed to retire the Colonial, the next step will be turned over to a group of High School students who could get feedback from students and continue the process. This should generate enthusiasm with the students as they search for agreement on their new mascot. The students that brought forward this request in July did not want it to be about what the mascot should be. They wanted it to just be that this mascot is offensive to many of them.

Members continued the discussion. Comments included:

- More than 50% of the alumni wanted to keep the mascot. As so many people said, the Colonial represents courage and liberty and we should look at it in the spirit of fighting for freedom and protecting the people. This person wanted more input.
- The tally numbers in Tessa's memo were not votes from students, alumni and community members. It was just requested feedback.
- Every inclusion issue is divisive. This is the Committee's chance to be part of the healing process for our community, on both sides. We (the community) all need to be friends again, and recognize each other as human beings. We need to coexist together.
- If we're waiting for this to become more palatable, it won't happen. This is the work. It doesn't get any more real or urgent than this.
- It doesn't matter what someone's background is. As Kendi writes, it is the person we need to see. Asia has no lack of colonial history. It's more of how we come back and look at people to work together with them.
- We have learned that there are people that feel the colonial makes them feel actual pain and disenfranchised. Members should set an example of making students and staff feel loved at school. We have a responsibility to take care of our community.

Comments from the COMMUNITY included:

- I am so proud and hopeful to see how strong the students are. It says a lot about the education AB has given them. I commend the students for framing the narrative.
- It was most impactful when I got out of AB and met others in the country. These are tumultuous times and the kids will be out of High School soon. This is a bit of a stretch regarding the colonial.
- I am a chinese american woman and was educated without anyone that looked like me. I want to change all symbolism that supports that.
- The Colonial mascot represents what some people want to be. Now you must decide whether it's time to include people of color, Asians, Native Americans and all minorities. This will not stop the people's voices at AB.
- The High School students are taking an active role. It is time for adults to listen and respect. It is an opportunity to show our young people that we care.
- As a staff member, parent, and person of color, do we really want to glorify the injustice that is so uncomfortable to so many of us? If even one student is uncomfortable with the mascot, it should be changed. We should make all feel welcomed and included.
- Some of the comments completely erase the narrative. It is so painful to know that people in the community continue to bolster this.
- As an ABSEJ leader our message is that we are changing AB already and look forward to sharing more projects with you in the future.
- The Board of Trustees of First Parish Church of Stow and Acton voted to support the students and the Mascot Initiative and thanked all for the work they have done.

- This would be better served in the community if it was not decided tonight. It only represents half of the students. You need to understand what the full population wants.
- People need to know that the diversity of our community has changed dramatically over the recent years. You are hearing this now because we are hearing the voices now. They are our neighbors and friends.
- Concord Carlisle has the Patriots and Lexington has the Minutemen. We took these names in the same spirit. It was not celebrating their rebelliousness. The public should be able to read the letters.
- This has only divided the town. You should form an exploratory committee with a diversity of views and they could decide. Be open minded about the citizen soldier that sacrificed his life for us.
- As a leader of ABSEJ, we honor the Nipmuc and Indigenous People's Day. We support native arts and cultures. Thank you to all who have made these conversations possible, including the email writers and School Committee members for hearing them out.

#### MOTIONS:

Kyra Cook moved ***"to retire the AB Colonial Mascot, with the understanding that programs and new purchases made by the District will no longer bear the name "Colonials", but changes to existing capital items such uniforms, scoreboards and other items will be undertaken as time and funding permit."*** Evelyn Abayaah-Issah seconded the motion.

John Petersen stated that there is no question having seen the responses that the Colonial does not represent our diverse student body. While voting will not relieve members of the desire to move forward with the community, it will still be difficult and painful. He asked people to, "Be kind and deeply understand the pain that is a stranger to you."

Angie Tso offered a friendly amendment to the motion, ***"to retire the AB Colonial mascot by recognizing that the old Colonial mascot represents courage and the spirit of fighting for liberty."*** John Petersen seconded.

Kyra Cook accepted the friendly amendment. Evelyn Abayaah-Issah did not accept the amendment. As a result, the friendly amendment failed and members would vote on whether or not to accept Angie's amendment to the motion.

Nora Shine asked if adding "the original spirit intended by the Colonial mascot was to reflect" (not "did reflect") to the beginning of Angie's amendment should be added as a further amendment. Tessa suggested that this would not be acceptable because it does not acknowledge why the Colonials name is being changed. Evelyn strongly agreed and wants to be direct with the vote and not minimize the decision. Adam also disagreed with the suggestion. He suggested that wording could be included that talks about what AB students represent

instead of what the mascot represents. Kyra was very much in favor of this approach adding that “This is the grace that is important.”

Angie withdrew her amendment. John withdrew his second to the amendment. Adam Klein offered a new friendly amendment to Kyra’s original motion, adding “***recognizing that there are many positive attributes of our town history that we associate with the students of ABRSD***” after the words, “Move to retire the AB Colonial Mascot...” Nora Shine seconded the friendly amendment. Kyra Cook and Evelyn Abayaah-Issah both accepted the friendly amendment.

Committee members unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to accept the amendment.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Committee members unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** on the motion as amended: “***To retire the AB Colonial Mascot, recognizing that there are many positive attributes of our town history that we associate with the students of ABRSD, and with the understanding that programs and new purchases made by the District will no longer bear the name “Colonials”, but changes to existing capital items such as uniforms, scoreboards and other items will be undertaken as time and funding permit.***”

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Tessa thanked everyone who had been involved and the Committee for their respectful discussion.

c. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

i. Policy – Diane Baum (met on 10/7/20)

1. Subcommittees of the School Com (new), File: BDE - Second Read - **VOTE**

2. FYI: School Committee Officers, File: BDB

Although voting by the Committee on subcommittee members has not been our practice for about 3 years, this clause exists in the BDE policy so it should be consistent. It was agreed that the current process has been fine, but it might change in the future.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call:** to approve the new Subcommittees of the School Committee policy BDE.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

ii. Acton Board of Selectmen - Kyra Cook

Acton Annual Town Meeting has been postponed to a date to be determined but no later than June 20, 2021.

- iii. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) - *Tessa McKinley*  
The postponement of Acton's Town Meeting was discussed.
- iv. Building Committee Update - *Peter Light*  
Foundations are starting to be dug and rebarred soon. Steel is expected early in the new year. We are still on schedule for the maximum guaranteed price in early/mid December. We just completed our last MSBA submittal. Acton is working with us to keep permitting fees low.
- v. Other Reports:  
EDCO: Kyra and Nora attended the recent roundtable. There is considerable concern about the budget process for next year. All want greater access to covid testing. Everyone talked about teachers' stress right now with the pandemic.  
Acton FINCOM: Amy reported that they are finalizing their Point of View.  
ALG: The School Committee and Selectboard were asked to form a committee to investigate cost saving analysis. There was some concern about staff being overburdened with getting back to school so it will wait. The Acton Selectboard took an unprecedented vote regarding the School mascot which was outside their purview. Amy wrote them a letter.

6. **Selection of ABRSC Delegate and Alternate to the 75th Annual MA Association of School Committees Meeting on November 7, 2020 - VOTE** - *Tessa McKinley (9:00)*

John Petersen moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve Amy Krishnamurthy as the ABRSC delegate to the Annual MASC meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup>, and Adam Klein as the alternate.  
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

All members are welcome to attend the virtual conference. Diane described how valuable her experience has been at it. Only the delegate may vote on the resolutions.

7. **Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve – VOTE** – *Tessa McKinley*

John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** see motion on warrant memo.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

8. **FYI**

- a. MASC Report of the Resolutions Committee - to be discussed November 5
- b. This Month in the Division of Open Government, September 2020

9. **Adjourn**

Mr. Light shared his appreciation for how the School Committee modeled how to have a difficult conversation for the students and the community.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED by roll call:** to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:58 p.m.  
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley,  
Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

Attachments: Statements read by Larry Dorey, Peter Light and some School Committee  
members at this meeting

List of documents used: see agenda

**NEXT MEETINGS:**

October 29 Workshop on School Committee "Policy, Procedure and Purview"

November 5 New Meeting at 7:00 p.m.



I wasn't going to say anything at the opening of this meeting because what else could there be to say? But the last 24 hours have been a rollercoaster and I would be remiss if I didn't note my disappointment in some of the adults that are part of our community. It bears repeating that those who sit around this table as school committee members are volunteers. We are elected officials and we stated our desire to be in this position but we are also parents and neighbors. Our kids go to school with yours. We shop in the same grocery stores. We borrow from the same libraries. The tone that some have taken in their disappointment over the last few days is disgraceful. A few weeks ago, the students in our district were reminded by the counseling department to be kind in their remarks to others. Apparently the grownups should have gotten the reminder as well. I hope that those who are tuning in will truly listen to the remarks which I know many have been preparing all week. I'm prepared for this to be a civil discussion about the question that was put before us. I recognize that there are many who don't understand the process and policies by which the school committee is governed. I will lay out again the timeline of events that has brought us to this evening. In early July, the school committee was presented with a petition that at the time had over 1300 signatures requesting that we retire the colonial mascot. In August, I, along with other district leaders, met with the student group that brought forward the petition. As it was closely tied to the anti-racist work we have been doing as a district, the group (ABSEJ) asked to give a presentation to the full committee. That meeting occurred on September 17th when the students put together a presentation and answered questions from the committee. Shortly after, I sent out a request to all members of the community for feedback. This request went to every single junior high and high school student. It was sent to the Beacon. It was sent to alumni groups and sports booster clubs. We received feedback from many constituencies during the nearly three weeks of public comment. There was also a counter petition started which those on the committee are well aware of. This petition has not been formally presented to the committee. So, here we are. We have received nearly 700 emails. In my time on the committee, that far exceeds any other issue we have taken up including the reopening of schools in the midst of a pandemic. I, for one, am incredibly proud of the students and their eagerness to be engaged. It's one thing to sign a petition, it's quite another to write a coherent, thoughtful email to a public body with your perspective and beliefs. Hundreds of students took the time to send us emails. They represented both sides of the issue. They were respectful and thoughtful. Whatever conclusion the committee comes to tonight, I hope that all the members of our community will remember that words matter. Be kind.

Thank you to the School Committee for allowing me to express my own views on the AB mascot.

As a member of the HS I have considered myself an AB Colonial for the past 27 years. I have attended more school events under the banner of an AB Colonial than I can possibly recall. I take pride in past traditions and I have tremendous respect for the Alumni who graduated as AB Colonials.

In my opinion, our mascot should be a symbol that unites and instills pride in every student and staff member at the high school. By reason we are here tonight, it is evident that the Colonial Mascot no longer unites or inspires pride for all of our students and all of our staff.

With all due respect to the community and AB alumni, the mascot should represent the students and staff that reside in the building today and it should be viewed in the context of the world we live in today. Finally, it should symbolize something that all our students and staff can embrace.

If we are going to be an inclusive learning community where every individual feels valued, then allowing symbolism that represents less than that for any number of students and staff is unacceptable.

Thank you

Good evening everyone. We are about to start a discussion of our current mascot, the Colonial. Specifically, you are deliberating about whether or not to discontinue the use of the mascot, or to reaffirm our use of the colonial as our mascot. This topic has drawn quite a few passionate feelings from both people who support retiring the mascot, and people who believe we should keep the mascot. I want to add a few thoughts, but not before a few disclaimers: First and importantly, I am a relative newcomer to Acton Boxborough, and I hope everyone listening understands that this status limits my own ability to speak to this topic. My second disclaimer is that while I feel limited in my ability to speak to the topic in deference to the many community members who have been here for decades or even generations, I also feel somewhat compelled to speak as a leader for our school district, for our staff and most importantly for our students. My final disclaimer is that, as someone who comes from a multi-generational New England family, I relate deeply to the history and traditions of our colonists. Growing up, I lived in a pre-Revolutionary era home, and my brother is just one of multiple generations of our family who lives in another pre-Revolutionary home. I hold our history in deep regard, though admittedly, I am not a historian. When I hear the word "Colonial," I not only know some of the history behind the word, but feel a deep emotional connection to our colonial past because the history of the colonials is also largely the history of me. This is certainly felt and understood by many in our community who have this same connection to those original colonists who fought for freedom from the British and we heard this clearly in the feedback.

Since we received the petition and especially over the last few weeks, I have focused more on trying to hear the voices of those who hold a different perspective on what it means to be colonial. I have asked questions like "what does it mean to be a Colonial if I am from another place or have a life experience other than my own?" For example, People from India may have a different perspective on what it means to be Colonial; People from Vietnam may have a different perspective as well. Similarly, people whose families may be from former Dutch or Spanish Colonies will likely have different perspectives on what it means to be a Colonial. Or what does it mean to be a colonial if you are from Puerto Rico or the Philippines among other places we as Americans have colonized? What does it mean to be a Colonial if you are Native American? What does it mean if you are of African descent, or LatinX? Does being a Colonial hold the same meaning for you? Is being a Colonial a universal feeling?

I also wondered how these perspectives may change if we were to provide more education about our local history so that our students can more deeply understand our local version of colonials. There is probably merit to this and no matter how much we educate students about our community's past, we can always do more. I think many of us with strong ties to New England feel deeply about the American push for independence from Britain and the sacrifices of those who came before us providing us the opportunities we have today.

What occurred to me while thinking about this and listening to the feedback we received is that I, along with many members of our community, not only have an intellectual connection to this history, but an emotional one as well.... Because this history largely represents me and my

I wasn't going to say anything at the opening of this meeting because what else could there be to say? But the last 24 hours have been a rollercoaster and I would be remiss if I didn't note my disappointment in some of the adults that are part of our community. It bears repeating that those who sit around this table as school committee members are volunteers. We are elected officials and we stated our desire to be in this position but we are also parents and neighbors. Our kids go to school with yours. We shop in the same grocery stores. We borrow from the same libraries. The tone that some have taken in their disappointment over the last few days is disgraceful. A few weeks ago, the students in our district were reminded by the counseling department to be kind in their remarks to others. Apparently the grownups should have gotten the reminder as well. I hope that those who are tuning in will truly listen to the remarks which I know many have been preparing all week. I'm prepared for this to be a civil discussion about the question that was put before us. I recognize that there are many who don't understand the process and policies by which the school committee is governed. I will lay out again the timeline of events that has brought us to this evening. In early July, the school committee was presented with a petition that at the time had over 1300 signatures requesting that we retire the colonial mascot. In August, I, along with other district leaders, met with the student group that brought forward the petition. As it was closely tied to the anti-racist work we have been doing as a district, the group (ABSEJ) asked to give a presentation to the full committee. That meeting occurred on September 17th when the students put together a presentation and answered questions from the committee. Shortly after, I sent out a request to all members of the community for feedback. This request went to every single junior high and high school student. It was sent to the Beacon. It was sent to alumni groups and sports booster clubs. We received feedback from many constituencies during the nearly three weeks of public comment. There was also a counter petition started which those on the committee are well aware of. This petition has not been formally presented to the committee. So, here we are. We have received nearly 700 emails. In my time on the committee, that far exceeds any other issue we have taken up including the reopening of schools in the midst of a pandemic. I, for one, am incredibly proud of the students and their eagerness to be engaged. It's one thing to sign a petition, it's quite another to write a coherent, thoughtful email to a public body with your perspective and beliefs. Hundreds of students took the time to send us emails. They represented both sides of the issue. They were respectful and thoughtful. Whatever conclusion the committee comes to tonight, I hope that all the members of our community will remember that words matter. Be kind.

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Since we received the petition and especially over the last few weeks, I have focused more on trying to hear the voices of those who hold a different perspective on what it means to be colonial. I have asked questions like "what does it mean to be a Colonial if I am from another place or have a life experience other than my own?" For example, People from India may have a different perspective on what it means to be Colonial; People from Vietnam may have a different perspective as well. Similarly, people whose families may be from former Dutch or Spanish Colonies will likely have different perspectives on what it means to be a Colonial. Or what does it mean to be a colonial if you are from Puerto Rico or the Philippines among other places we as Americans have colonized? What does it mean to be a Colonial if you are Native American? What does it mean if you are of African descent, or LatinX? Does being a Colonial hold the same meaning for you? Is being a Colonial a universal feeling?

I also wondered how these perspectives may change if we were to provide more education about our local history so that our students can more deeply understand our local version of colonials. There is probably merit to this and no matter how much we educate students about our community's past, we can always do more. I think many of us with strong ties to New England feel deeply about the American push for independence from Britain and the sacrifices of those who came before us providing us the opportunities we have today.

What occurred to me while thinking about this and listening to the feedback we received is that I, along with many members of our community, not only have an intellectual connection to this history, but an emotional one as well.... Because this history largely represents me and my

experiences. I may have empathy for those who hold an alternate perspective, but I will never truly understand their feelings because I have not *lived* their experience. We have seen emotion run high in many of the responses we received arguing both sides of this issue.

So my focus has been on listening to the voices of others who have different experiences than me. There is no level of education or re-education that will change the emotions associated with being a colonial for some in our community regardless of which perspective you take. Because while being a "Colonial" represents me, it does not appear to be representing us all in the same way.

Over the last few years, I have heard our community speak with pride about our diversity. This diversity is something that sets apart from many communities around us. I have also heard people talk with pride that AB has been a community that has embraced this change. Twenty years ago, our student body was over 95% white and now we are just over 50% white. What we are hearing from many of our students and faculty is that while being a Colonial may represent *me or half* of the community, it does not represent large groups of us the same way. Moreover, we have heard that for those among us for whom the colonial is not representative, it damages their ability to feel truly a part of our community. From what I believe I am hearing, our continued use of the Colonial as a Mascot has created "Us and Them," and "Insiders and Outsiders" based on who a person is within our community. This does not feel consistent with the values we hold. This isn't necessarily done with poor intent, but now we know the impact.

Interestingly, despite our colonial history, Acton and Boxborough schools have not always been "The Colonials." Thanks to one of our school committee members for their outreach to the Acton Historical Society, it appears that the use of the Colonial as a mascot began gradually in Acton during the late 1950's and was possibly linked to the telephone extensions to the area. The Colonial was then gradually adopted by an increasing number of high school athletic teams until it became more widely used. The Junior High School however, was the "Warriors" until the 1990's when a group of students came forward because they felt being represented as "The Warriors" was no longer socially-conscious. At this time, working with their school administrators, they decided to call themselves Colonials to align with the high school. While we have a several hundred year history tied back to colonial America, there were decisions that we can find in our own history when people, usually led by students, made the decision to either adopt or change the mascot based on their social principles.

"Colonials" is on many of our uniforms, courts, scoreboards and in other places throughout our schools and the cost of making these changes is not inexpensive. To replace the athletic uniforms purchased in recent years will cost between \$200-300K. Rather than replacing new uniforms, we would likely need to gradually phase out the use of the Colonials logo on new purchases. On a positive note, the band uniforms can be changed with only a modification to a patch, so this is relatively inexpensive. For items such as scoreboards, sound systems, gym curtains and floors, these are larger capital expenses that will need to be further explored and the cost is not likely insignificant. Our budgets will likely be challenging over the next few years and we will not have many resources available to implement changes quickly. From a

pragmatic standpoint, changes made now will likely need to be phased in over time as budgets allow. This is not a reason to steer a larger decision on the issue, but an important acknowledgement of the reality that even if a change is made, it will take time, possibly several years to make changes in a fiscally responsible manner.

As we have seen from the many emails over the last two weeks, the mascot carries meaning for our students as well as our community. Unfortunately what we have heard is that this meaning is not universally held and agreed upon, because who we are as a community has changed significantly in the last 60 years. We have a deep and rich history as a community and this decision will need to continue to recognize that history as we move forward. However, we also have an opportunity to be a part of a new chapter in that history in recognizing not only the past, but the present and future of our community as well.



In as much I understand and respect that the colonial mascot is a source of pride and holds sentimental value for many, there is no doubt the mascot has excavated MAJOR issues of race in this community by the mere volume of emails received and social media post. What has come to the surface of this discussion is the embarrassing and completely disgusting embodiment of the privilege of the white person, especially the white male, who is afraid to lose his power.

The tension and charge of hostility that this topic has brought upon our community, shows the institutional and systemic power some white person is afraid to lose and the disregard their actions may have on non-white residents in this community, depicts the inequality in Acton Boxborough, and the fact that the white male is by far the beneficiary of this divide.

The racial discomfort many of you who oppose the retirement of the mascot are experiencing is as a result of your deeply internalized sense of superiority and entitlement over BIPOC. The fact that those of you who oppose think you are more deserving and that something as small as changing a mascot presents a change to your racial identity is concerning.

It saddens me that the smallest amount of racial stress is incomprehensible to many of you and the mere thought of retiring the mascot triggers such discomfort and anxiety.

The fact that so many of you are so fired up by this topic is evident to me that AB has a long way to go as a community when it comes to equity, diversity and inclusion. It saddens me to see the fear this has exhibited.

There are so many ways to remember the history of the United States of America, that does not internalize racism and/or glorify colonialism or the colonials.

I take the anger and resistance to mean that many of you view a direct correlation of retiring the colonial mascot as taking down the power of white people in our community. Some of you see yourselves as entitled to and deserving off more than any other person in this community. Why do I say so, let me share a few comments in the emails I received?

- *We should not cater to the less than 2k in a town of 25k*
- *You should have thought about it before moving to Acton*
- *Complete waste of time*
- *radical activist - Instead of applauding the bravery of the students for raising this issue*
- *by allowing a minority to change the mascot, you'd best be prepared to change it every few years, as the community "grows and diversifies"*

That to me is fear coupled with racism!

Irrespective of how we view the colonials, if we can't agree that there is a violent and unacceptable part of the history then we have a huge problem. As a community if we are truly committed to honoring our diversity and making it inclusive, we MUST make a conscious choice to relearn our understanding of the History of America as it relates to race, not the version learned in schools, not the version devoid of black voices, and experiences.

In order to truly understand modern forms of racism and the small steps you all can take to make it inclusive for your neighbors and friends of color, you must be open to learning and understanding the point of views of BIPOC. The incomplete and ahistorical understanding of racism is what has us even having this discussion today and the reason for the comments above.

If we cannot change small things like an image on a school uniform that makes many in our community feel disempowerment and sadness, how are we supposed to change larger issues of racism and equity in our community. We must as well stop deceiving ourselves.

For those who took time to support the retirement of the mascot, thank you.

for those who oppose, I have advice for you, racism has taken a different form from the Jim Crow era. Use the discomfort you are experiencing now to help you understand why you feel so by this topic and why the topic of racial dynamics make you cringe.

We as a community we need to stop seeing ourselves from our individual narrow viewpoints/perspectives and see ourselves as human. If you deny the sentiments some of you have displayed is racist, we can't fix it.

The issue of race is woven in the fiber of our country, and thereby in our community, so for those of you who have tried to justify all the good work of the colonials, let me remind you, Thomas Jefferson turned to science to try to justify the natural differences between blacks and whites. You know the colonials did not fight for people like me. So while you enjoy your spoils from the colonials, take some time to think about how that affects others. Be on the right side of history even if it feels uncomfortable.

My dear SC colleagues, if for nothing, given the tension this discussion has brought to the surface, let's retire the mascot, it is divisive, and we do not need that in our district.

**Symbols are easy targets.**

Take them down and you don't have better housing, education, health care.

I share concerns voiced by many in our communities that this is taking up too much oxygen.

If my colleagues on SC want to change the trajectory of the lives of minority students, then we should be pairing the DEI initiatives in our District LRSP with stronger advocacy to eliminate the educational practices and policies at AB that hold minority students back –

- a) like disciplinary policies/practices that prioritize suspension and expulsion over restorative models,
- b) like fighting for access to AP English courses in 9<sup>th</sup> grade for all
- c) and like revisioning how we teach foundational literacy skills. 85% of juvenile offenders are struggling readers. 3 out of 5 people in U.S. prisons can't read. And, as we have all heard, minorities are disproportionately represented in these populations.

**We received 700 letters.** Very few struck me as particularly inclusive. Symbols have power. They hold historical memory. The petitioners and their supporters see intergenerational pain, land theft, genocide, intolerance, whiteness in its most pejorative sense and the lie of a 'sanitized' history while others see Acton's honorable, courageous, principled-driven social visionaries battling tyranny and dying to secure for future generations the ideals of self-determination and individual liberty that were eventually encoded in our founding documents. (Talk about the constitution as a national policy document that by nature can be adjusted to align with the changes of a changing society- that's part of the brilliance in it – that it outlives time.)

**I think the mascot should honor the history in a way that is not controversial. I don't see that happening and the petitioners offers nothing to us on this point which is unfortunate. When the mascot is "dismantled" and replaced with a dolphin or a tiger or nothing, what the petitioners will have won is a new symbol -- that of a perhaps unbridgeable crevasse filled with hate and division for white against brown and brown against white for cancelling each other's single story.**

I don't have the answer to this conundrum. I think it is imperative to call out injustice when you see it, and I commend the petitioners for doing so, but to vote tonight--- to "resolve" this with a vote --- is to even further entrench a culture of deafness and indifference on both sides. This conversation offers a unique opportunity for our communities to grapple with each other's single story if our minds are open enough to do so. I would like to see ABSEJ and ECARES come back to us with some choices for a better, more inclusive mascot.

We as SC members have an opportunity tonight to shape the narrative and understanding of our students' identities as members of a community: black and white and brown. A vote either way tonight, in my view, would squander an opportunity to further engage students and our towns in a conversation that could start the process of eroding racism in Acton and Boxborough and offer the promise of a better future which embraces the complexity of our past and envisions a more empathic and equitable future.

On April 19th, 1775, Acton resident Isaac Davis, alongside Abner Hosmer and so many other neighbors (including at least one Black man, the records show) marched into dawn to answer the call of a nation that had only just begun to dream of its own future. They stepped away from their homes and their families to push back—bodily—a government that no longer represented their values, didn't know or care who they were, what they believed in, what they hoped for, or what they lived their daily lives for. In the cold and the dark, in the face of bullet volley, unto death, they sought what we now enjoy, venerate, and uphold 245 years later: The opportunity to articulate our own future. The expectation that we live under institutions that see us, know us, care about us, and protect us. And that we and our neighbors abide by the mutual understanding of our shared values and humanity.

The same spirit of restlessness and desire for recognition, equality, evolution and growth whisper to the young inheritors who walk these ancient streets and tread these ancient fields. We taught them all the right things: that they should speak up in the face of simple wrongs, that they should be brave in the face of significant opposition, and they should give it all they've got, until the end, win or lose.

30 days ago, a group of students came to us with a simple request: to provide them with the opportunity to choose for themselves what best represents them as a student body. They asked us to shed a symbol that no longer represents their collective values, fails to celebrate them as a tapestry of diverse individuals, and declines to recognize the humanity we share with the Nipmuc Nation, who were here long before our town's forebears. Furthermore, the Colonial mascot fails to recognize the shared humanity of the many, *many* different groups of people who came to live here after the events of the Revolution. We should be reminded that many of the groups that have come to settle in this town share their own histories of facing down tyranny and empire.

A mascot is symbol to rally under. A touchstone. A representation of what we value and who we are. By anchoring ourselves in one time with one romanticized caricature, we have denied ourselves the opportunity to represent ourselves to the world as the dynamic community we actually are. These students should be given the same opportunity our venerated forebears were given: to articulate for themselves who they are and how they want to be represented. We should honor their request and then honor their choice. The choice before us is actually that simple: will we honor the spirit of restlessness and desire for recognition, or will we stand in their way?

While I understand that this is a challenging and potentially divisive topic, I am so grateful that we have the opportunity to have this discussion and to deliberate as a committee.

Over the past four weeks I've taken the opportunity to review the comments from the community. I've spent time reflecting on the rich history of our towns and region. I've considered the perspectives of others and looked at this through the lens, of our charge, as school committee members. Most importantly, I've struggled with my decision.

Now this is not the first time this committee has struggled with who we are "serving". Some parts of our roles and responsibilities are clear, we set policy, approve budget, and hire and evaluate the superintendent. But who do we represent? Is it the students of our district? Is it the tax-payers? Is it the voters? Whose perspective do I consider when I make a vote?

At the end of last year, the district and this committee made a conscious decision to engage anti-bias and anti-racist professional learning. We spent the summer learning on our own about the topic and held a workshop as the school year started to share our experiences.

It is through reflecting on this work that I've considered some additional questions.

- How do I take action to be anti-racist? Knowing that there is no such position as non-racist.
- Through my lens as a cis-white-male, how can I work to understand those from vastly different backgrounds?
- How can I work to raise the voices of those who have been systematically silenced?
- How does our work on diversity and inclusion get us to the ultimate goal... Belonging?

It was upon this reflection that I came to my decision. I'm not here to tally votes or pick the majority. In fact, our work should be to do the opposite. If even one person feels marginalized by this mascot, then we all must do the work to understand why. We must all take action to make sure our entire community feels as though they belong.

I encourage this committee to take swift action to retire the mascot, and to take thoughtful action to identify ways to engage our diverse community on an inclusive path that leads to everyone feeling as though they belong.

When the petition to retire the Colonial mascot first surfaced this summer, I was agnostic about it and open to both sides of the argument. I felt the same way a month ago when the students presented the petition at a meeting in September. Then the emails began to arrive, and the responses from both sides was illuminating. At first I was struck about the many emails about Isaac Davis, Captain Brown, Deacon Hunt, and other Acton Colonials—men after whom our streets and neighborhoods are named. But who else was here in Colonial times? Why are the only Colonial era Acton residents who have been memorialized white men?

Like many of you, I have been struck by the thoughtful responses of students, educators, residents, and alums who have widely divergent views on this issue. But I have been even more struck – stunned – by the rank hostility of many responders who are against retiring the Colonial as our mascot. Most stunning of all are the responses that actually attack the character and motives of the AB students who brought this petition forward. These are statements made by adults in our community against sixteen-year-old students who live in our towns and attend our high school. I am so saddened to absorb the example that some adults are setting for our kids, who are watching and listening. We need to do better than this.

We've received so many emails asserting that the Colonial is "our heritage." But is it? Our community is incredibly diverse, with residents and students of many different ethnicities. Both of my parents arrived in this country in the 1940's from Europe as toddlers and war refugees. So the Colonial is not my heritage. But the thing is, no one would know that by looking at my children. What does it feel like to some kids at AB who don't "blend in"?

We've received many emails stating that our vote on this petition – which again was brought forward by our students in July – is "dividing" our community. From my reading of the responses, the division already exists. I appreciate the many thoughtful and well-reasoned responders who feel we should keep the Colonial mascot but who did not stoop to maligning those with a different view. I have read, understood, and considered your views. But as an Acton resident, mother, and School Committee member, I want all of the children in our District to feel valued. I hope it is a goal that you share. Many students and AB grads have sent us heart-breaking emails explaining how and why they don't feel valued, and how the Colonial moniker contributes to their feeling that they are outsiders in their own community. The sheer number of vitriolic responses has led me to believe firmly that in this moment, when long ignored and marginalized groups are facing increased hostility and even violence, we need to stand up and acknowledge their voices. I hope that we can continue having this conversation, but in a civil and respectful manner, knowing that how we express our opinions matters almost as much as what those opinions are.

One thoughtful respondent to the SC survey said "I hope you can hold two ideas in your head at the same time." I will ask you to hold at least four.

First, in the SC discussion in which we designated Indigenous Peoples day as a school holiday, Evelyn asked, "What can we do to make sure that future SCs don't change the name again?" I responded that we cannot bind the action of future committees. However, the likelihood that a future committee would take a different approach is minimized when the SC takes time to thoughtfully consider an issue and documents our process and conclusion. With respect to the AB Colonial name and mascot, I believe we should take the time to assimilate our history and the perspective of our community before we act.

Second, several comments noted that there is a pandemic, we are in a novel and less effective than usual learning mode and wondered why a name had risen to the level of an important item on the SC agenda. I accept the validity of this perspective and fully agree that we have never been more challenged. And it is also true that a capstone of elementary and secondary education is a sense of personal identity and of our roots in the history of mankind. We must do both. We must address myriad operational challenges and support our students as they search for individual and collective identity.

Third, many, many comments spoke to the horrors of colonialism and the urgent need to remove the connotations of colonialism from the "AB Colonial" name and our mascot. I accept that human history is stained by the global actions of colonists and their actions in North America. We know that some colonists engaged in the destruction of cultures, the taking of land and property, slavery, and murder.

Here is my perspective.

The questions we must ask are: who are the "AB Colonials" and what did they do? Is the word "colonial" or "colonialism" so powerfully tainted that its attachment to anything is damning to the combination name? As we review the history of Colonial New England and of Acton and Boxborough there should be no rush to judgment.

I do not accept the facile conflation of "colonialism" and the Acton-Boxborough Colonials. From my view this is an example of the fallacy of ambiguous reference. First, we should consider who the "AB Colonials" have been since the adoption of the "Colonial" team name about 1957. The term "AB Colonials" is most closely aligned with the students, family, faculty and staff who have worn the Colonial uniform or cheered for the Colonials as they competed in sports or the arts or designed graphics for our yearbooks. The positive and negative qualities associated with the "AB Colonial" name most strongly relate to the positive and negative qualities of these modern people. Whether or not we adopt a new name, the Acton-Boxborough Colonials of 1957-2019, will remain Colonials in our videos, in our yearbooks and on our banners and trophies.

While the rationale for ABRSD's adoption of the Colonial name is not known, we can reasonably speculate that the reference was to the qualities and lives of the Colonial men, women and children of Acton and Boxborough in the period focused on the 1700s and, in particular, to the Blanchards, the Conants, the Hosmers, the Wetherbees and others who established and grew the communities.

We should recognize that the Colonials of this era included free black men as well as slaves. These Colonials included indentured servants, Jews and Quakers. We should consider how they treated each other as well as how they treated the Nipmucks. We should understand what they built along with what they destroyed. We should recognize that the stone walls that still run through our communities reflect the primary occupation of most of these colonials – farming.

And we should reflect on the fact that in 1642, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the first law in the New World requiring that children be taught to read and write. The strong school system in the Commonwealth was born in the Colonial era.

Then we can weigh the historical actions of Acton and Boxborough Colonials both good and bad recognizing that they, like us, are human beings. No name will separate them, or us, from human history.

***Kwai Chang Caine:*** *Is it good to seek the past, Master Po? Does it not rob the present?*

***Master Po:*** *If a man dwells on the past, then he robs the present. But if a man ignores the past, he may rob the future. The seeds of our destiny are nurtured by the roots of our past.*

I believe that that the community will benefit from further discussion of our history and our name before the School Committee acts. The immediate effect of acting this evening will be to create division in our community, not to move us forward.



My hope is that this question of the high school mascot will be the beginning of a learning process for members of our community, as it has been for me.

My first reaction when I heard this question raised was:  
What could be wrong with the word Colonial???

My idea of Colonial went to our family's love for Little House on the Prairie, Fifer's Day, the Revolutionary War. My family is not from here. Our family ancestry is Spanish, Norwegian and German, I grew up in Texas, we have been in Boxboro for only 4 years. But we have embraced and come to love our local celebrations that make our towns special.

Then I began to see emails flooding in, with anxiety and anger at the thought of changing the school mascot. Why is this so important, I wondered. And then I realized, this has to do with our country's current reckoning with our past and current racism.

I found myself staying up late, reading historical accounts of Acton and Boxboro's history. One interesting thing I learned is that school building projects in the 1800s were as complicated as they are today! I also learned that Acton High School was one of the first high schools to allow girls to take upper level math classes. I also learned that yes, **here** in Acton and Boxboro, there was enslavement, imprisonment and genocide of the native Americans who at first befriended and helped the colonials. I have been learning about the multiple viewpoints, and that those first colonials did not always see the people who were living here first, as fully human.

It has been 350 years since first colonists came to "settle" in this area: (1660s)  
It has been 245 years since colonials fought in the revolutionary wars: (1775+)

It has been 70 years since ABRHS began as the AB Colonials. The 1950s were a very different time culturally, with much less awareness than young people have today of women's right, and the rights of persons of color.

In all of these 350 years, there has been a LOT of history, and a lot has changed.

I believe as a community we should continue to celebrate aspects of our local history that are a true source of pride: Fifer's Day. Patriots Day. our Revolutionary heroes. I disagree with vilifying our heroes, though we must look fully at the history, including that which we do not want to repeat. As we are connected to where we live, we also must realize that OUR history, connected to this place, began well before the colonials arrived, and includes nonwhites. The people who lived here prior to the arrival of the colonials have an important history, and a different experience of colonials that I hope will be better understood by our students and community.

As for the question of a mascot, the intent of a school mascot is to bring together, inspire and celebrate our school community. It should not be a source of pain, embarrassment, or damage to any school community member. We can do better than that. We must move to change the mascot, and hope that our community will begin to work together as we begin to explore the possibilities of a new mascot.

Compassion benefits not only the receiver, but also the giver.

I want to start by acknowledging that Acton-Boxborough Students for Equity and Justice (ABSEJ) brought up this topic, because many students do not feel comfortable being represented by the Colonial. As stated in the petition, the students see that we use A White Male Colonist as a Mascot; it's glorifying Colonialism. At the same time, with the same Colonial Mascot, there is a very different view for others. Instead of seeing the Mascot as a white male colonist, many people correlate it with pride and are inspired by the courage and spirit of the 37 Actonians who fought for liberty so that we can have this beautiful place to live now. I don't know about you, but I was very surprised to see the response of getting an email at almost one email per minute rate yesterday from both sides and 2300+ votes on retaining the Mascot vs. 2100+ votes to change the Mascot on Change.org petitions. To me, it shows that our community is divided at this point. I have a couple questions that I would like to invite you to think about before you make tonight's decision.

- What are we trying to build with all of these efforts?
- Will a simple retain or not result help us build a better community?
- Can we achieve our diversity and inclusiveness goals?
- If we just focus on a vote to retire or keep without further conversation and understanding, how much will our students learn from this process?
- What values do we want our students to learn or character do we want our students to build?

I feel by pushing a vote tonight without a broader and deeper understanding of those issues in the community and engaging conversation from both perspectives, we are not setting a good example on how we can learn from each other and work together as a community. I do not think we should vote with the current suggested motions tonight. By not voting as stated tonight, it is not equivalent to the case being closed. It means we want to establish a community with engaged conversation, and listen to different perspectives. It means we are taking the time to learn more about the issues so when we come back to revisit, we have a better understanding of each other. For example, schools can have activities in Social Studies or in extracurricular activities (like Speech and Debate) that can foster deeper conversation. Have students discuss and engage in finding AB's identity and spirit together. At the same time, form a study group in the community consisting of both the retire and retain points of view. This study group would work on summarizing the retire and retain arguments for the AB Colonial name and the AB Colonial mascot. A report to the SC could summarize the arguments for each point of view with no recommendation, and the arguments could be submitted to the Committee by January or February 2021. This pause provides an opportunity to unite the different perspectives and move this topic forward so it lines up with our district goal on inclusiveness and diversity. As the first generation of immigrants, racism is not foreign to me. Actually three weeks ago, my daughter, who was born and raised here, had someone drive by her, pull down their window and yell "Chinese virus" at her.. It's clear that we have a lot of work to do. Because of that, should we retire the Mascot? The answer may be yes or no by the end, but I urge that we take time to work this out in a united way.