



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

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www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

December 15, 2022 from 7:00 p.m.

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

APPROVED MINUTES

- Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 9:32 p.m.), Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang, Rebecca Wilson
- Members Absent: Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley
- Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino
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1. CALL TO ORDER (7:00)

The Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order at 7:00 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.

2. CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - *Kyra Cook*

a. Public Participation

Corinne Hogseth referred to the meeting two weeks ago when the Superintendent defined empathy and encouraged people to listen to each other and digest comments before voting on issues. Ms. Hogseth believes that Committee members do not listen to input or opinions they disagree with.

b. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Given the full agenda, the update was brief and would be sent out to families and posted to the website tomorrow. Mr. Light stressed that they are seeing a large uptake in flu, covid and rsv. He strongly encouraged families to keep sick children home.

3. GUESTS AND PRESENTATIONS

a. Literacy Overview - (see slides)

Deborah Bookis, Jennifer Truslow, Sharon Ryan, Dora Sanchez, Stacy Vallely, Kerry Cusick, Christy Nealon, and Ann Marie Phelan

i. District Goal & Outcomes: MCAS and iReady - *D. Bookis, J. Truslow*

When asked how much time is spent preparing for MCAS every year, it was stated that while the skills needed for success are kept in mind, specific MCAS prep work is not done.

ii. Dyslexia Regulations - *J. Truslow*

Amanda Bailey, Co-Chair of the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee, loved the proactive identification of students with this need, but expressed concern about students who were not identified early and are still struggling now in 4th, 5th and 6th grades. Is there a plan to address that and the social emotional costs for them of not being able to read?

- iii. K-6 Literacy Teaching: Curriculum - D. Sanchez, S. Vallely, K. Cusick, D. Bookis
Given the needs of our multilingual learners, how will this improve the data we are seeing? Deborah Bookis commented that scheduling allows students access to the core curriculum which actually has MTSS built into it and includes multilingual components. It does not seem add-on or extra. All of the programs are geared to make the structure cohesive throughout the grades. Referring to slide 7 regarding the Fall iReady breakdown, students' performance shows some relative strengths, but vocabulary and comprehension skills are shown as an issue. There is now a focus on these areas. The district is not changing what they are doing, but looking at ways to complement what is already being done.
- iv. Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)
This is a multi-year process. We now have a collective efficacy team that can bring all of the resources together for the teacher and student. Previously, teachers had to coordinate this themselves. When asked how the Committee can help with the challenges of this process, Deborah stated that one of the most important things the Committee does is the budget. Making sure the staff has the resources for materials and professional learning is key.
- v. Family Engagement and Professional Learning - D. Sanchez, D. Bookis
Amanda Bailey expressed concern about progress reporting to families and inconsistent responses some parents have received when they asked for reports. Not having report cards or homework at early primary grades adds to the difficulty. Parents and caregivers need this information so they can partner with staff and help kids. Amanda referred to policies [IK](#) Reporting Student Progress and [IKAB](#) Student Progress Reports to Parents/Guardians.

Members discussed the importance of this issue. Guidance regarding communicating with parents and caregivers has been shared with educators. If parents are not receiving information about their children, the Administration needs to know. This is not to be punitive but to support consistent implementation. Mr. Light acknowledged that the amount of work done by our educators over the past several years around this shift in practice has been "monumental" and it takes time. It is also important that data be given in context, for instance at fall conferences with other student information. Last year, all reading specialists created one document to share with all families they work with regarding reading support.

Members asked for a general letter regarding what parents can expect to be informed about in a timely way, perhaps with a timeline and/or goal. Mr. Light will consider this although it assumes everyone is on the same timeline and work is not always linear. It was noted that progress also depends on the School Committee providing funding. Amanda Bailey called attention to the underperforming subgroups, and asked that they be engaged right away because they cannot wait. Deborah said a website will be created to explain some of the jargon being used so it is understandable for everyone.

b. *FY24 Budget Overview - Peter Light, David Verdolino*

Dave gave an early preview of the budget. The first full presentation will be on Jan 12. The proposal is based on using \$1.25 M of E&D for FY24 at this time. FY23 budget increase was 3% after a reduction of 20.6 FTE staff (slide 4). The State is calling for a 14% increase in out-of-district tuition and transportation. Some of the covid grants are going away and will need to be made up for. Early projections indicate a gap of approximately \$3M between estimated revenue and initial expense projection. Keeping the Acton levy limit in mind, total budgeted revenues of approximately \$105.5M are estimated. Based on early estimates, the all-in costs of a level service budget are estimated to be approximately \$108.5M, an increase of 5.4%.

State funding is based on a Chapter 70 formula foundation budget that is set in stone. Because we are a relatively affluent community, we are in the hold harmless category. There are movements starting that may help communities like AB. Dave is watching them including a recent bill that has been filed. Significant challenges are expected. Members of the Acton Leadership Group were thanked for their participation, as well as the Acton Select Board and Finance Committee. The Town of Boxborough continues to see an increase in the number of students coming from Boxborough. As a result, Boxborough residents' increase in assessment will be higher.

c. *Administrative Update to Book Challenge - Peter Light, Deborah Bookis*

Mr. Light summarized the ABRHS Library Book Challenge: [This Book is Gay](#) by Juno Dawson memo in the packet emphatically affirming that "the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District is and will remain a safe space for all students, staff and families, including those who identify as LGBTQ+." Differences in opinion are important to have but it is also important that we don't try to read intent into why there are different opinions. Per the process and policy in place regarding curriculum, the book was reviewed by a committee and it was reaffirmed that it will remain in the High School library. This is a final decision and cannot be reviewed again for a three year period. It was recommended that the same review process be used for the Junior High Library. This was done and it was recommended that this book be removed from the Junior High collection.

Comments from School Committee members included:

- Knowledge is power. Fear is the driving emotion behind this outrage. Kids need to be safe and feel safe. This is “our” community and we keep “us” safe.
- The issue raised was not that these topics were being taught, it was that this book is in the High School library.
- Per MA law, parents may opt out of the sexual education program at the High School. Many of the topics in this book that people found offensive are questions that come up from kids in our sex ed classes. This book is a resource for students who may be looking for more information about their situation, although some of the book’s language is not what we or educators would use.
- When you think about the broader, “our” children vs “my” children, you have to be broader regarding what is available to people. Parents who have concerns were encouraged to work with the Administration to be sure their children are well protected in the school environment. This member wanted his children to have access to additional resources in the school library.
- Outside groups are here providing tactics and guides and support for how to quiet the noise coming from this book. At the same time, we’ve seen recurring vandalism at our junior high where swastikas have been placed in open view, but no one has come here tonight to talk about these active symbols of hate. These symbols are meant to antagonize, divide, suppress and hurt. This book is a way for a reader to privately explore their identity. We should strive to build up our neighbors, support our friends and help our kids become the best versions of themselves that they can be. “Let Love Rule” per Lenny Kravitz.
- Some of the things said online seem so out of bounds. We are a community. Our kids all go to school together. It is very upsetting that our teachers have been accused and disparaged. Think twice before commenting negatively about the people who educate our students. They are amazing and work really hard. Let’s set an example for our kids.
- Our High School library should affirm that all of our students are whole humans. This book is not part of any curriculum or in classroom libraries; it is a book of a thousand in the school library. This is not being forced on anyone or part of any agenda. This is about access and availability.

Comments from the public were limited to 2 minutes each and included:

- The President of Common Ground at the High School shared that the 20 members of the group often say they feel so safe in some classrooms because books like this are in our library and they can have discussions that allow them “to exist”. She hopes people can see this value and thanked the Committee.
- This is not just about one book. Why is a poster with a list of books hanging in a classroom? Someone is trying to create awareness and push an agenda.
- This is a thoughtful book for teens, oriented toward safety and what not to do. It is also available at the Acton Memorial Library.

- The Grapes of Wrath was one of the most banned books in the US and is one of the greatest he's ever read. The diversity and inclusion of Acton is really important.
- Regarding internet safety, entering a birthday is often all that is needed to enter a platform. Grindr is used by predators, for human trafficking and prostitution and hate crimes. Copies of a WGBH article regarding the safety of Grindr were left for Committee members.
- Decades of research back up that comprehensive sex education keeps our kids safer, including the social aspects. The Constitution does not permit the official suppression of ideas and particularly regarding school libraries.
- An advisor for Common Ground shared that not all students feel safe coming to the group, or talking to their parents about what books they take out of the library or about puberty and figuring out who they are. This book has an unwillingness to shy away from what life looks like to be gay. Our students need this book for when they're afraid to talk to their parents, educators or doctors.
- A social worker/therapist, parent and member of the LGBTQ+ community has witnessed the devastating results of what happens when LGBTQ+ youth don't see reflections of themselves in their homes or community. The need for mirroring is crucial. Suicide ideation rates for these young people are more than double their heterosexual peers. It is critical to continue making this a safe and welcoming community for all, and specifically providing access to this type of literature for young people.
- A student stated that one of the most common arguments is people saying that gay men are predators, but almost every "To Catch a Predator" show starts with someone finding victims on Tindr, not just on Grindr.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. FY2023-24 School Calendar - First Read - *Peter Light*

Members were asked to consider a new, more easily readable format. The start of school is based on when Labor Day falls. Three teacher days are being proposed before school starts (includes one professional day that used to be in November). This year two weeks in November were broken up back to back so the proposal prevents that. As a result, school could start right after Labor Day. Making the day before winter vacation a half day is suggested because it is a big travel day for families. The proposed calendar shows the last day of school on June 17 if no extra days used.

In response to coordinating childcare, Community Education will offer as many programs as they can but it depends on available staff. Some local businesses offer extra days. A member asked for more publicity for childcare options. Members liked the one page format highlighting religious holidays on the front. The week of June 17-25 could be in yellow so parents see that school could go that late in the year. Could the information on the right side be chronologically listed with the blue items separate?

One member preferred the usual months going down the page instead of across. The Jr High early release days will be added in the next version.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

- a. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
 - i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 12/01/22
 - ii. Approval of Donation of \$16,000 from Friends of the Acton Libraries to the ABRSD Libraries
 - iii. Approval of Lifetouch Commission Check to RJ Grey Jr High School
 - iv. Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - Middlesex Savings Bank to Proscenium Circus
 - v. Recommend to Dissolve Class of 2014 and F.I.S.H. Student Activity Ledgers
 - vi. Recommend to Transfer F.I.S.H. funds to Economics Club and Future Business Leaders of America
 - vii. Approval of Donation to Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Softball Program of batting cage and storage shed

Adam Klein moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda with gratitude.

- b. Subcommittee and Member Reports
 - i. School Resource Officer (SRO) Subcommittee / Vote to Establish a Subcommittee to Recommend the Future of SRO Program - **VOTE** - *K. Cook*
Adam Klein reviewed his memo in the packet that resulted from discussion at the 12/1/22 ABRSC meeting. At that meeting, members decided to form a subcommittee to further evaluate the SRO program and make a recommendation to the School Committee regarding the future of this program.

A member who was not at the 12/1 meeting asked how this decision was made. Kyra Cook explained that people at that meeting said there had not been enough time to give input and vote on this program. Adam suggested that a subcommittee could gather all of that information via a survey and share it with the full committee for a decision. Adam was the only member who volunteered to chair the subcommittee. The member who was not at the 12/1 meeting felt leadership of the subcommittee should have been opened up to all members. Adam accepted the feedback and suggested that if any other members wanted to chair it, including himself, they could contact Kyra and she could decide.

A new Committee member felt the process was still being rushed. Kyra pointed out that the subcommittee was what was asked for. Over an hour was spent at the last meeting on this topic and months will be spent talking about it after the survey is done. A timeline has not been provided yet because it was agreed that the subcommittee should discuss this and present it to the full Committee.

There was a discussion about the best way to include input from the Select Board and Finance Committee given that the town of Acton funds the SRO program. There was a sense of the Committee that outreach to the two groups should be done but not necessarily have them as subcommittee members. Kyra agreed to take the data from the proposed survey and accept an email from anyone who wants to be considered for the subcommittee or chair of it.

Liz Fowlks moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to create this subcommittee.

ii. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz*

iii. Policy - *Ginny Kremer*

1. Class Size Guideline Policy, File IIBA - Second Read - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
This agenda item was tabled because Ginny had to leave.

Adam Klein reported on the recent School Building Committee meeting. There has been a delay in the installation of the solar system. Nexamp is waiting for approval from Eversource, resulting in additional cost of approximately \$150,000 at this time. The contingency fee could cover this. Offsetting our electrical usage cannot start until the solar system is in place. Parents have complained about pot holes which have now been filled. Concerns like these are best brought up to the school principals.

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 for motion).

FYI

- Monthly Student Enrollment, December 1, 2022
- Community Coffee (virtual), January 18, 2023

NEXT MEETINGS: January 12 & January 26 ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium

6. ADJOURN

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC at 10:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

Agenda, agenda item summary pages, Literacy Memo from D. Bookis 12/7/22, Presentation slides, Early FY24 Budget Update Memo from P. Light 12/13/22, Presentation slides, ABRHS Library Book

Challenge: This Book is Gay by Juno Dawson Memo from P. Light 12/9/22, ABRHS Library Book Challenge: This Book is Gay (2021) by Juno Dawson Memo from Reconsideration of Instructional Materials Committee 12/6/22, Article from citizen - "Unseen: The Boy Victims of the Sex Trade" GBH News J. McKim, P. Martin, G. Lopez 7/12/21, FY24 ABRSD School Calendar for First Read, Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 12/1/22 from B. Petr, Friends of the Acton Libraries Donation Letter from J. Fox 12/1/22, Donation checks from Lifetouch LLC, Middlesex Savings Bank, Student Activities Funds Transfer of Funds between SAF Club Ledgers Form from Class of 2014 to Class of 2025, Student Activities Funds Transfer of Funds between SAF Club Ledgers Form from F.I.S.H. to Economics Club/Young Investors and Future Business Leaders of America Clubs, ABRHS Softball Boosters Club Donation Letter 12/6/22, School Resource Officer Evaluation Subcommittee Memo from A. Klein 12/12/22, Proposed revision to Elementary Class Size Guidelines policy IIBA for Second Read, Warrants Memo from D. Verdolino 12/13/22, Student Enrollment 12/1/22