



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

March 16, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

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

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Liz Fowlks, Adam Klein (8:06 p.m.), Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang, Rebeccah Wilson

Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah

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

1. CALL TO ORDER (7:00)

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

Members of the public were invited to watch the meeting online using Acton tv's youtube channel. The Chair 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*

Kyra thanked the music department and students for the "extraordinary" all-school band concert last night. She and her family were very impressed, especially with the jazz band.

Noting that six Acton residents are running for School Committee in the April 25th election, Kyra invited any in attendance to say hello. Jason Fitzgerald and Leela Gangolli Ramachandran introduced themselves. Kyra invited the other candidates to say hello at future meetings. March 28th is the last day for Boxborough residents to file nomination papers for the two open Boxborough seats. Their election is on May 16th.

a. ABRHS Student Representative Update - *Rohan Ravindran, Harshini Magesh, Molly Norris, Diksha Mhatre, Julia Zhou*

Molly spoke about MCAS testing is coming up for 10th graders. The Interact Club auction is coming up and benefits Boston Children's Hospital. Rohan spoke about the budget cuts and teachers that will have to be let go. He shared some of his experiences with those teachers highlighting that they are "incredible people" whose work is very important to students.

b. Public Participation - none

c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light spoke about the High School Course Levels Presentation, Leadership Coalition to Combat Hate and Bias in Schools, 20 Year Chair Ceremony, World Cultures Week, Literacy Week, Project Graduation, Out of Darkness Walk for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and the Upcoming Cartwheel Care Webinars - Positive Relationships with Screen-Based Technology.

3. GUESTS AND PRESENTATIONS

- a. Regeneron Talent Search Top 300 Scholar- *Advay Goel: The Geometry and Limits of Young Partition Flow Polytopes*
ABRHS student Advay Goel gave a fascinating presentation on his winning project.

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

- a. Recommendation to Approve Superintendent's FY24 Final Budget and Assessments - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light reminded the Committee that a $\frac{2}{3}$ weighted vote of the full Committee is required for approval. The Governor's recently released initial budget proposal provides an additional \$150K in revenue to the district. This revenue has been incorporated into the district budget and allows us to:

- restore a junior high school health and physical education teacher,
- include an additional English Language Educator (High School), and
- increase our budget for substitute teachers, an area of critical need in our schools.

Members briefly discussed the addition of two English Language Educators in light of cutting other staff. Deborah Bookis explained that the Administration evaluates this area each year. They consider students who move in as well as those coming to the High School from younger grades. Speaking in strong support of adding another ELL teacher at the High School due to the language intensive curriculum, a Committee member stated, "This is exactly where we should be putting our money."

Ginny Kremer moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call:

That the Committee adopt the budget of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024 as presented in the amount of \$105,897,586;

Which is reduced by estimated receipts and available funds in the following amounts:

- Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$15,792,511;
- Anticipated State Transportation Aid in the amount of \$2,241,018;
- Anticipated State Charter School Aid in the amount of \$150,000;
- Anticipated Medicaid Reimbursement of \$250,000;
- Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$300,000;
- Estimated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$25,000;

And transfers from the following District reserves:

- Excess & Deficiency Fund in the amount of \$1,375,000;
- Capital Stabilization Fund in the amount of \$150,000.

For a net amount to be assessed to member towns in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$71,669,758 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$5,766,655 and an Operating Assessment of \$65,903,103); and

Boxborough \$13,944,299 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$1,026,900 and an Operating Assessment of \$12,917,399);

(YES: Bloomenthal, Cook, Fowlks, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Schwartz, Wang, Wilson)

- b. Recommendation to Authorize the Superintendent to Submit to the MA School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form for the Conant School - **VOTE** - *D. Verdolino*
Mr. Light explained that this submission is to get AB in the pipeline for the future but we are not expecting to be accepted into this round. There are no emergencies at Conant.

Tessa McKinley moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on March 16, 2023, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated March 16, 2023 for the Luther Conant Elementary School located at 80 Taylor Road, Acton MA which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future for the following Priorities:

- Priority 2 - *Elimination of severe overcrowding* – the building lacks the space to operate as a 3 section school while also accommodating other necessary programs to meet the needs of all students.
- Priority 5 – *Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy efficiency and conservation, and decrease energy related costs in a school facility.* – Based on a facilities study, the building was identified to be in need of over \$22 million in capital needs and code upgrades, and additional funds to remediate hazardous materials contained within the building.
- Priority 7 – *Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements.* The building is well over 50 years old, having been constructed in 1970, with the only updates being a roof in 1986 and boilers in 2007. “Temporary” modular classrooms were added in 1995 to address overcrowding; they are still in use 28 years later.

and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

- c. Superintendent's Mid-Cycle Goal Review (Discussion) - *Peter Light*
Mr. Light provided mid-cycle remarks on his Annual School Improvement Plan and Goals. He thanked the staff for all of their efforts. Overall, we are making reasonable progress, with some minor adjustments. Even though three goals don't seem like a lot, the amount of effort it takes to move things forward can be very significant. The work that has to happen every day in every classroom also needs to be done.

The Administration is looking hard at the number of goals and reasonable action steps being expected of elementary staff to try to take some of the burden off of educators and create a level of sustainability for everyone. We can't try to do everything. Sometimes we need to scale back a little to prioritize and have a deeper impact. The MTSS roll out is a significant piece of work for the district and multi-year. We are seeing our kids meeting growth targets. The Administration is very pleased with Cartwheel Care and how extraordinarily responsive they have been.

Members were asked to let the Superintendent know if any adjustments need to be made to his goals.

A member asked how teachers feel about everything going on in our schools. She wants to make sure that teachers feel supported. Mr. Light responded that there are always things that derail progress, including finding enough substitutes when staff are out. This affects planned classwork. He noted that "Improvement is not linear." Staff are still seeing challenging student behaviors coming out of the pandemic. The administration hopes to have some of the last irready data in time to include in the end of year reports.

- d. Discussion of School Committee Reorganization - Policy BDA, BDA-R, BGF
Adam Klein asked members who will continue next year for their thoughts about Committee leadership. (Kyra, Amy, Yebin, Tessa and Evelyn are retiring.)
At the previous meeting, members discussed extending the chance for someone to temporarily Chair the Committee for about three meetings, but in talking with the Superintendent, Adam realized that there is a lot of discussion about planning the summer so it might be better to not have a temporary position. Vice chairs are also needed. Adam liked the idea of giving one of the newer members a chance to get some leadership experience. That said, Adam offered to take the temporary leadership position if members wanted him to do that.

Comments from the Committee included:

- A "guest host" is not a good idea because there's no consistency. The Committee is still at a transition point. If we can have someone do it for the rest of the year, it would be better instead of giving people a chance to just try it out. Two members agreed.
- Ben offered to step up for three months if no one else wanted to do it. He has chair experience and knows Robert's Rules of Order.

- No matter what, the Committee has to vote to bypass some of their policies. If they wait for the first meeting after the Committee reorganizes, that person could finish this year's term and serve next year, or they could vote someone to do the next three meetings and then at the same time, or at a later meeting, they could vote for next year's Chair.
- If they vote at the five new members' first meeting, they know nothing about being a member and it is not a wise way to choose a leader. If a temporary Chair leads the Committee through the summer meetings, then all eleven members would be more aware of their roles and responsibilities and informed decisions could be made in September. Adam and Ben have volunteered to be an interim chair.

The Annual Organization Meeting policy BDA was reviewed a few years ago because this transition was awkward. Marie Altieri described it as a "shared leadership" with a chair and two vice chairs to split up the work and provide a succession plan process. Because the next meeting is the last meeting that the retiring Acton members will be in their seats, she suggested that there are three important leadership roles to be filled. A chair could be voted on at the April 13th meeting that carries through for the next year and then decide when to vote the vice chairs. The chair decision could be separated from the vice chairs'. A member noted that dividing the work and the vice chairs' responsibilities have not been clearly defined in the past.

Adam summed up the discussion and suggested the Committee revert to the Superintendent's original recommendation, that at the first meeting with all of the new Committee members, the election is run with the new Committee members to elect someone to chair for the rest of the year and the next year. Perhaps at the first meeting, the chair can then facilitate a discussion with the Committee about when the vice chairs would be voted on. A vote would be needed to suspend policy BDA when the new committee is seated. This would prevent a sense of an outgoing committee voting on a new chair. The new committee would decide on their leadership.

A member of the public suggested inviting the vice chairs to run a meeting to give them some practical experience. They could also do some job shadowing of the chair to develop leadership.

There was consensus that the Committee would take Adam's suggestion.

- e. Subcommittee and Members' Report
 - i. Budget Subcommittee - *Adam Klein*
In addition to the Budget, the Town Meeting presentations were discussed.
 - ii. Policy Subcommittee - *Ginny Kremer*
 - 1. Proposed Use of School Facilities, Policy KF - First Read
Director of Community Education (CE) Erin Bettez joined Ginny for the First Read. She attended several policy sub meetings and explained the cost challenges involved. Our Facilities Use policy for outside groups

needs to reflect the increased cost of energy and the ability to shut down parts of our buildings when not in use. We are much more energy efficient than in the past and want to ensure that the district doesn't lose money when charging rent. The School Committee is also moving toward more equitable policies and procedures because there have been certain groups that had favored status in terms of paying to use the facilities. Many wonderful groups do great work that enrich our community and our children, but we want to treat the groups equitably. Scheduling and tracking staff time has not been included in rent calculations in the past. There are now three classes on the rental chart.

The proposed changes came from the direction of leadership regarding equity and tightening up the budget. Energy fees have risen significantly since 2016 when the current fees were set. Also in 2016 the buildings were busy all the time, in part because we did not have the ability to turn on and off different parts of the building like we do now. Groups were not charged energy fees because the lights would all be on for a group so it didn't matter if another group used another room. Now we power down if a room or section is not occupied. Regarding the equity issue, Erin looked at groups that don't fit neatly into the three categories. Scouts and travel basketball are examples that have caps on their rentals.

Comments from the Committee included:

- A letter was received from travel basketball. It's important to consider how increases affect the groups. It's hard to never be charged an energy fee but now to be charged per hour of use. Erin has met with some of these groups and is trying to work with them, suggesting that there could be ways they could lower their costs and meet in the middle. Other groups' fees would not be as impactful. The Superintendent added that the Administration doesn't want to devalue any group, but we can't put a higher or lower charge on different groups as we move forward, there are new groups. We need to be consistent.
- Is there any discussion about grandfathering or staggering the increases? The policy sub discussed this.
- This is a struggle because it's an expense for the district and during this type of budget year we have to protect our revenue sources. Should the community pay for energy or the groups who use it? Was there some ability or discussion about giving the Director of CE the authority to grant extra time to a group or to grandfather one? It was discussed but it's hard to explain why some groups have paid full price all this time and others have not. All of the groups do valuable things.

Many members of the public wanted to voice their opinions. Erin explained that the fees go into the Revolving Account to be used for things like the marquis sign and other needs. Youth groups are unique because most of the fields they use, they have paid for with the District.

Several people spoke in support of the scouts. They explained how increasing the participation fees that the young people pay would mean that some would not join. They cannot absorb much higher fees. It was suggested that to balance that situation the District should look at what the organizations are giving back to the schools. Equity is really hard. If costs increase, some people will miss the opportunity. The District was urged to look at the totality of the groups before deciding. Consider how many scout troops do their projects on school property. That donation of time and equity should be quantified for the discussion.

Ginny stressed that this was a First Read to gather input. Two members asked for the Second Read to include a slow ramp up of fees or special status for certain groups. There are some organizations that do a lot for the community and the schools could partner with them. A member noted that we've provided quality not equity. Some groups run larger organizations and can pay more, and some cannot. Several members felt that there should be more than three fee groups, including dividing those with larger financial bases.

- f. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
- i. ~~Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 3/2/23 (at next meeting)~~
 - ii. Recommendation to approve Merriam PTSO \$7300 donation to Merriam educators to purchase diverse and culturally responsive books
 - iii. Recommendation to approve \$25000 check for the thirteenth installment from Dragonfly Theater to Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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

- g. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Kyra Cook*
Adam Klein moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants. See memo for vote language.

FYI

- Student Enrollment - 3/1/23
- Community Coffee 3/22/23 (virtual)
- Acton and Boxborough Town Election Calendars
- Bill to Increase State Share of Foundation Budget
- [CASE Collaborative newsletter](https://casecollaborative.wordpress.com) (https://casecollaborative.wordpress.com)

5. ADJOURN

At 9:33 p.m., Adam Klein moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used; agenda, agenda item summary pages, Conant Statement of Interest, ABRSD District Strategy 2021-2026 Mid-Year Update: Annual District Improvement Plan School Year 2022-23, Mid-Year Update slides, School Committee Annual Organizational Meeting policy BDA and procedures BDA-R, Suspension of Policies policy BDF, Proposed Updates to Use of Facilities procedures KF memo from E. Bettez and A. Shen 3/10/23, Donation Letter from B. Haan 2/22/23, Warrant memo from D. Verdolino, Monthly Student Enrollment 3/1/23, Acton Annual Election Calendar, Boxborough Election Calendar, Bill to increase state share of Foundation Budget, CASE Collaborative Newsletter.

The meeting scheduled for March 30 was canceled.

NEXT MEETINGS: April 13 & May 4 at ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin. Building Auditorium