



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

May 18, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

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

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Tori Campbell, Liz Fowlks, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 9:37 p.m.), Vikram Parikh, Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebeccah Wilson

Members Absent: none

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

1. FY24 ABRSC REORGANIZATION

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Superintendent Peter Light.

The chair stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org. Mr. Light welcomed all of the new School Committee members, including five new members. He looks forward to working with all of them.

a. Election of Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Officers - *Peter Light*

i. Suspension of policy [BDA](#) procedure [BDA-R](#) (Item #5) to allow for terms to begin immediately - **VOTE**

Due to the timing of the Acton and Boxborough elections and that the former Chairperson and Vice-Chairs have retired, there was a proposal to suspend policy BDA as well as procedures item 5. Item 5 states that terms begin on August 1. Suspending that item would allow new terms to begin immediately. A weighted vote of $\frac{2}{3}$ of members in attendance would be required to pass.

Ginny Kremer moved and Ben Bloomenthal seconded a motion to suspend policy BDA temporarily and procedures BDA-R.

Members discussed again the timing of when the new Chairperson and Vice Chairs begin their terms. A suggestion was made that perhaps they should start right after the budget was developed in March. Giving more time for new leadership to spend with outgoing leadership would be helpful. Reaction was mixed. It may be considered next year when that election is closer. Members agreed to take a vote to suspend the policy as proposed, and consider making a request that the FY24 policy subcommittee review this policy and procedures and bring suggestions to the full School Committee.

The Committee **VOTED** unanimously to suspend BDA and BDA-R.

1. [File BGF: Suspension of Policies](#)

- ii. School Committee Annual Organizational Meeting policy & procedures [BDA](#) and School Committee Officers policy [BDB](#) -
Terms begin immediately due to preceding vote to suspend policy BDA-R #5.
Mr. Light explained the procedures. For each of the three positions, he will open the floor for nominations for the position. Members may nominate another member or themselves and a second is not needed. A vote will be taken to close the nominations. Each nominee will be given a chance to speak and then members may speak in support of a candidate. Roll call votes will be taken per committee procedures. Each member will vote for one candidate. A candidate must have a majority of weighted votes to be elected. The Candidate with the most weighted votes will be declared the new Chairperson, unless no candidate receives a majority vote. In that case, additional roll call votes will be taken. A majority vote if all 11 members are present is 13 (total = 25.5).

iii. ABRSC Chairperson - **VOTE**

Mr. Light declared that nominations were open for FY24 Chairperson.

- Ben Bloomenthal nominated Adam Klein.
- Rebeccah Wilson nominated Ben Bloomenthal.

Ginny Kremer moved to close the nominations and Liz Fowlks seconded. The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** to close nominations. (YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

Ben Bloomenthal withdrew his nomination. Adam thanked Ben for the nomination. He considers this a real opportunity for the committee to begin working to engage and develop the next group of community leaders. Several members thanked Adam for chairing again and helping them think about goals.

The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** to approve Adam Klein as the ABRSC Chairperson for FY24.

(YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

iv. ABRSC Vice Chairperson from Acton - **VOTE**

Adam Klein declared that nominations were open for FY24 Vice Chairperson from Acton.

- Ginny Kremer nominated Rebeccah Wilson.
- Liz Fowlks nominated Yanxin Schmidt.

Ginny Kremer moved to close the nominations and Ben Bloomenthal seconded. The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** to close nominations. (YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

Yanxin and Rebeccah shared some of their leadership experiences and both would be happy to serve if elected. Members appreciated both nominees' willingness to step up and several stated that both "would shine in this position".

The Committee **VOTED by Roll Call** on their choice for Vice Chairperson from Acton: Bloomenthal = Rebeccah, Campbell = Rebeccah, Kaja = Rebeccah, Klein = Rebeccah, Kremer = Rebeccah, Ramachandran = Yanxin, Schmidt = Yanxin, Schwartz = Rebeccah, Wilson = Rebeccah
Liz Fowlks and Vikram Parikh abstained.
The Committee approved Rebeccah Wilson as the Vice Chair from Acton.

v. ABRSC Vice Chairperson from Boxborough - **VOTE**
Adam Klein declared that nominations were open for FY24 Vice Chairperson from Boxborough.

- Leela Ramachandran nominated Liz Fowlks.
- Ginny Kremer and Vikram Parikh also nominated Liz Fowlks.

Ginny Kremer moved to close the nominations and Ben Bloomenthal seconded. The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** to close nominations. (YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call** to approve Liz Fowlks as the ABRSC Vice Chairperson from Boxborough. (YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

vi. ABRSC Secretary - **VOTE**
Ginny Kremer moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to appoint Beth Petr as the Secretary of the School Committee for the 2023-24 school year.

2. CALL TO ORDER & CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME (7:15) - *Adam Klein*

Adam again welcomed the new Boxborough members to their first meeting as well as everyone in the audience. He reminded all that the meeting was being recorded.

a. Public Participation

Marilynn Kaplan, a member of the ABRSD DEI Family and Community Advisory Group, and the Leadership Coalition to Combat Hate and Bias Speech spoke as an AB parent and on behalf of Congregation Beth Elohim's Kulanu Initiative, a project of the ADL engaging synagogues in local opposition to antisemitism and bigotry. She expressed alarm about at least five incidents of Nazi imagery that have been shared or scratched

into school property during the school year. She stressed that a broad, community response is the most effective and powerful form of resistance to hateful ideologies. Kulanu will be reaching out to partners and allies to organize an ADL Walk Against Hate at the beginning of the next school year. Our towns are not immune from forces of antisemitism, racism, and bigotry that infect our country. We do not want these incidents to become regarded as normal school experiences. She asked for the School Committee's support to prioritize and create an active response to any form of hate speech and continue proactive education against hateful speech and actions.

Martin Benson read a statement referred to the previous meeting and the District's commitment to implement more transparent communication with the community. David Martin was very impressed with the recent 7th grade Civics Exhibitions and the tremendous breadth of topics the students covered.

Yanxin Schmidt shared thoughts as a new committee member. Because we are all shaped by our experiences, it is our nature to gravitate towards surroundings we are familiar with, and to people who we have had positive experiences with. She welcomed the other new members and humbly asked that people get to know her, rather than rely on any preconceived impressions or expectations of her.

- b. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*
Dave Verdolino, our Director of Finance & Operations was absent because he was being awarded the John F. Conway Distinguished Service Award from the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials, Inc. (MASBO). Kate Crosby was congratulated for her recent award. AB is one of the only districts to have a District Energy Manager. The ABRHS pool will be renamed in memory of Coach Jeff Johnson at a ceremony on June 11th.

Adam thanked everyone who attended Boxborough's Town Meeting for their unanimous approval of the school budget.

3. GUESTS AND PRESENTATIONS

- a. Elementary Schools Update - *Principals Dana Labb, Joe Russo, Lucia Sullivan, Allison Warren, Christy Nealon, Bryant Amitrano*

The principals spoke about their School Improvement Plans as well as the importance of them being six different schools but all part of one district. They spoke about Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes (MTSS), Inclusive Practices (CRP), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Each school spoke about their goals and objectives.

Members liked that the schools have kept their individual identities. The data work was also much appreciated because it helps to show a child's progress. Stability was mentioned given that Joe is the fourth principal in two years at Conant. Joe replied that

the staff has had to work some things out but the students have not had much trouble because the staff is so dedicated. The new principal is seasoned and will be great. The values of the school and its practices have remained consistent. In response to a question, members were referred to the MTSS website for extensive and valuable information on that topic.

Work is being done to integrate SEL so that is a focus of staff meetings. Schedules are always being worked on because all schools have challenges with them. Work continues on tiers and well as protocol about consistent parent communication. For Allison and Lucia getting used to a new school building took a lot of time. "Lots of new things with no time to prepare." They love having Joe Gibowicz and the early childhood program with them. Mr. Light thanked the principals and wished good luck to Brian in his move to Sudbury and Lucia in her move to Belmont.

b. Acton-Boxborough Community Resource Center Update/ Acton-Boxborough United Way (ABUW) Partnership - *Jen Faber, Andrew Shen, ABUW*

Recognizing the increasingly complex needs of families, a key priority for ABRSD leadership is to create a central location where Acton and Boxborough residents can access school registration services (including language screening), alongside information about local community resources. Special emphasis will be placed on assisting families with language barriers, those joining the community from abroad, and families that would benefit from additional community-based services and supports beyond those offered in the schools. The presentation covered: Community Demographics, Facilities Update, Community Partnership, Funding Sources and Staffing and Future Proposed Phases.

The Acton Boxborough United Way is eager to support this project as it closely aligns with ABUW's mission. The plan is to develop a formal partnership where ABUW serves as a contracted service provider for the District to oversee and provide a range of identified services and supports in a location within the Administration Building.

Members were very appreciative of this new effort, particularly because increasing a sense of belonging, especially when families first arrive in our community, is very important work. Right now, there is an elementary registrar and JH and HS registrars and it is very piecemeal. Another important benefit will be that screening will be done in the new center, before students are assigned to a school. Needed resources can be offered right away. The plan is to start small and grow. Families without children will be welcome to come for community information. A vote will be taken at the June 8 School Committee meeting to approve the Memorandum of Agreement with the ABUW.

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. Resolution #1 to Fund School Meals for All Students in Massachusetts permanently - **VOTE**

Rebeccah Wilson made the detailed motion found on page 19 of the packet. Ginny Kremer seconded.

Rebeccah has been in touch with Project Bread and free school meals were critical for families during the pandemic. Many people in the state would like this to continue for all students. A comment was made that this takes funding from educational expenses.

The Committee **VOTED** and approved the motion. (YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson NO: Kaja)

b. Subcommittee and Members' Report

i. Policy Subcommittee - *Ginny Kremer*

1. Proposed Use of Facilities Policy KF- Second Read - **VOTE**

A First Read was done on changes to policy KF at our meeting on March 16. Ginny thanked everyone for their input. As a result, a special group was created so scouts and some other groups in category 2 will not be charged user fees. (The two types of fees are user and energy.) This is responsive to the charge from the School Committee to make things equitable. The other charge was to ensure that district resources are not being diverted to non district purposes. Andrew Shen and Erin Bettez were thanked for their many hours spent on this policy. Legal counsel has also reviewed and approved the proposed changes. This process was started early in the year so groups would know the changes before they do their new budgets.

Comments included:

- As a parent involved in scouting, a member stated that he thinks this is fair and reasonable to ask, however scouts are concerned about escalating costs. He will be abstaining from the vote but will support however it turns out.
- It is too bad that people have to pay to use the facilities, but the reasons why are understandable. Rental fees are calculated to break even.
- It was suggested that a calculation sheet be provided so users can estimate their costs. Erin does this when users ask for information and when they agree to use space.
- Is there a clear enough distinction between 2A and 2B groups to warrant having 2B? Careful analysis of costs has been done.
- Federal Regulation Title 36 covers patriotic organizations very specifically (like scouts and Little League).

Andrew Schwartz moved to make an amendment to include the Federal Regulation with regard to 2A.

Members had a long discussion about whether and how to add the title name citation to the policy to be very clear. Erin does not want to have to keep changing the policy whenever the law changes. There are also Memoranda of Agreement with the District for field use (such as for Lower Fields) that could also be mentioned for clarity.

Andrew Shen felt this would be acceptable because it is adding a practice that we already have. He suggested adding wording similar to “Additionally any partnerships governed by an MOU currently in existence will supersede these guidelines.

Adam Klein made a friendly amendment to the proposed amended policy, to include additional references at the bottom of the policy to include existing MOUS and the definition of Federal Regulation Title 36.

The friendly amendment was accepted by Andrew Schwartz and seconded by Tori Campbell.

The Committee **VOTED** to approve the amendment to the proposed policy. (YES: Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson ABSTAINED: Bloomenthal)

Members considered the amended proposed policy.

A member reminded the Committee that AB Community Education makes a significant investment in the school budget and it is important to find an equitable way to allow them to do that so additional cuts can be avoided. The proposed changes felt appropriate to him.

John Petersen spoke from the public reminding the Committee that the decision to charge fees and identify groups is policy. The number and amount of the fees is not policy; it is budget. In his opinion, fees are procedural and he urged the Committee not to vote until there is a clean second read. He asked that the Superintendent report back on the fees amount for next year’s budget. The Chair noted that it is important that the policy be decided so groups can prepare their budgets for next year.

Rebecca Wilson moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the policy as amended.

(YES: Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Ramachandran, Schwartz, Wilson ABSTAINED: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Schmidt, Parikh)

The policy subcommittee was thanked for their extensive work.

ii. Leadership Coalition to Combat Hate and Bias Speech - *Liz Fowlks*
Mr. Light covered this in his update.

c. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Chairperson*

i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 5/4/23
Rebeccah Wilson moved, Leela Ramseceded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the meeting minutes.

d. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Chairperson*

Adam explained the warrant process.

Liz Fowlks moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants (see memo). Vikram Parikh abstained.

5. FYI

- Proposed ABRSC Meetings for 2023-2024
- ABRSD Retirees
- Monthly Student Enrollment - 5/1/23

Committee members must turn in their evaluations by midnight. Public comments are welcome until June 1. Next meeting is June 8 at 6:30 with an Executive Session to review evaluation.

Members are asked to do the summer workshop poll. Because there appears to be no common date for a full day, members may do a traditional evening instead so all can attend.

6. ADJOURN

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, public statement read by Marilyn Kaplan, public statement read by Martin Benson, Annual School Committee Reorganization Memo from P. Light 5/12/23, Presentation Slides from Elementary Principals, Presentation Slides from A Shen and Jen Faber, Proposed Motion regarding Resolution #1 to Fund School Meals for All Students in Massachusetts from R. Wilson, Guidance on Use of Facilities User Categories Memo from A. Shen 5/13/23, Use of School Facilities Policy KF and Addendum, Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 5/4/23 from B. Petr, Warrant Memo from D. Verdolino 5/15/23, FY24 ABRSC meetings, 2023 Retirees, Monthly Student Enrollment 5/1/23.