

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Approved Minutes

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting
To attend: <https://zoom.us/j/836444038>

March 19, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo (7:05 p.m.), Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri, Amy Bisiewicz, Deborah Bookis, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Dixson, JD Head, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino, Marc Duci (Acton TV)

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

Due to the schools being closed as a result of the coronavirus, Tessa stated that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar by all 11 School Committee members, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. It was also being recorded by the Zoom application and being live streamed on youtube. It will be posted on Acton TV's website tomorrow at <http://actontv.org/on-demand/government>. Per the remote policy, all votes were to be done by roll call with each member stating their vote after the Chairperson said their name.

1. OPEN MEETING

1.1. Chairman's Welcome

1.1.1. Annual Spring Town Elections

- Acton's Election is on March 31
- Boxborough deadline to submit papers is March 31 for Election on May 19

Tessa advised people to check the two Towns' websites for the most up to date information about the elections and Annual Town Meetings. The Acton Annual Town Meeting has been postponed with no new date at this time. The Selectmen are taking steps to delay the Acton Town Election. Boxborough Town Hall is taking similar steps regarding the election.

1.2. Public Participation –

Mr. Light reviewed how the webinar would proceed. The Chat feature was used to indicate desire to participate. Angie Tso spoke as an individual regarding a fundraiser that the AB United Way will be doing to support AB citizens during this difficult time. Christine Russell from the Acton Finance Committee asked that the School Committee take another look at the FY21 Budget before it goes to Town Meeting, given that some resources will need to be adjusted due to the impact of what is happening.

1.3. High School Student Representatives Update - none

1.4. Superintendent's Update

Mr. Light began with some limericks written by our Junior High students that while humorous, showed how some of them are feeling. Noting that there are some bright spots, he shared pictures of some teen service workers, the food distribution going on at the High School for the community, and a video done by our High School faculty. People are finding ways to connect with each other, which is very important.

2. NEW BUSINESS

2.1. School Closure Update – *Peter Light*

The Superintendent's memo "District Updates During the Coronavirus Closure" was reviewed. Our schools are closed through April 3, although that is likely to change. At this time, the last day of school would be June 23, 2020. This is all a work in progress and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Dave Verdolino spoke about the two financial implications slides. There are no major implications for revenue. Employees will continue to be paid their regular compensation. There are a few possible savings and expenses. The revolving accounts will suffer more than the operating budget. Mr. Light commented that it is monumental that the District has shifted from bricks and mortar so quickly to what we are doing online now. He thanked all of the Administrators, Principals, Teachers, Central Office and district staff for doing the very best for kids. This would not have been possible 20 years ago. The schools would have had to just close but now we are focused on keeping kids engaged with social and emotional connections and enrichment.

Comments from the School Committee included:

- There was much gratitude to the staff for all of their efforts that happened so quickly.
- The impact on adolescents' psych due to their loss of schedules, routines and seeing their friends is concerning. How can we assess how kids are doing? There is worry about people's mental health due to lack of connection.
- Members very much appreciate being kept in touch with the process by the Superintendent.
- As the School Committee's legislative representative, Ginny Kremer was asked to contact Lori Trahan regarding the USDA's authority to approve state waivers for reimbursement for the free meals. Although we have 11% of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch, not the 50% required for this assistance, Ginny will confirm whether we are eligible or not. She will reach out to the state delegation to see what is available for us at the state level. Mr. Light added that the MA Association of School Superintendents is also trying to do that.
- Dave clarified that his comments are not based on a granular analysis of the finances. This was an overview trying to anticipate major savings and additional costs. Referring to Christine's opening remarks, a member stated that it is extremely important to continue to pay all of our district workers. Food and shelter are people's most important needs. The next level is supporting people and that is where we are now.
- There is worry for our students who are seniors, and the impact of potentially missing so many of their end of year activities. Acknowledging this concern, Mr. Light said there is so much unknown about the future that it doesn't make sense to start making these plans at this time. The first need is to figure out when we will return to school and in what circumstances.
- In response to a question about new things being considering to implement for students to increase their collaboration, Deborah Bookis said the first priority is to ensure that all students have access to technology. There are some platforms that are now free but we need to vet them. There is a conference call with the Commissioner on this tomorrow. It is an ongoing process.

2.1.2 All Day Kindergarten (ADK)/PreK Tuition Refund or Prorate – Possible **VOTE** – *Marie Altieri*
Knowing that the schools will be closed at least 16 school days, the Administration asked for guidance about reimbursing families who pay tuition one month's tuition for the ADK and the preschool programs. Given the ever changing situation, one month was used as the time frame.

There was discussion of how giving up this funding and continuing to pay all staff would affect the budget. If the school closure extends through April vacation, this month would cover it. If it goes beyond, the Administration would return to the School Committee about it. When asked why the actual closure dates are not used, Marie explained that parents pay monthly and often use automatic credit card payments. This would simplify the reimbursement process, which is labor intensive. A member noted that monthly is a reasonable approach because it streamlines the decision process as well. Another member commented that the idea of charging people for services the District is not providing is wrong. Given that closing is expected to be longer, Dave

was asked to consider doing analysis to see if some revolving accounts will go negative and how that could be addressed.

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

VOTED by roll call: to waive tuition for the month of April for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District's All Day Kindergarten tuition and the Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program Tuition.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

2.2. Policy Subcommittee

The Graduation Requirements policy IKF revision and the request to name the ABRHS pool will be discussed at a future meeting. Members of the public who contacted the Committee about the renaming have been emailed so they know this.

2.2.1. Commitment to Workforce Diversity (NEW), File:GBAA – **First Read** – *Dawn Bentley*

Dawn Bentley explained that the District has prioritized hiring educators of color for the past few years and they are now trying to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds. The Administration would like to go a step further with a policy to show AB's commitment. While much of the proposed policy speaks of candidates from under-represented racial and ethnic groups, it was intentional to include language about recruiting both allies in the District's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work and those that value different perspectives. Dawn summed up that ultimately, a diverse workforce is a stronger workforce that benefits our students. There is no legal reference on this proposal because it goes above and beyond the customary policy.

Diane Baum commented that her understanding of what we're striving for in this policy is a confluence of two ideas that, in her view are not clearly articulated in the proposal. The first is the idea that applicants are selected on the basis of their qualifications, skill, merit & ability. The second is that we would concomitantly like to aggressively and proactively take actions that allow us to achieve a workforce at all levels that reflect the composition of the total student population so that there are adult role models in our school community that represent the diversity of our student body. In addition, this would create an environment that includes all types of people and encourages open conversation that promotes appreciation of our individual uniqueness. She would like to see more balance in the policy because it speaks to educators and leaders, as well as more balance about selecting applicants based on merits and ability versus diversity. Both are very important.

Other comments were made concerning the title of the policy and the purpose in the third paragraph. Members discussed what is meant by "diversity" and culture and asked that the policy subcommittee review this again before the Second Reading. A member asked, "Are we actually looking for candidates in an underrepresented group?" Another suggested there be more symmetry in the first and third paragraphs. The policy subcommittee will review this again at their next meeting.

3. ONGOING BUSINESS

3.1. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 3/5/2020

Diane Baum moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call to approve the minutes.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

3.2. Kindergarten Registration Update – *Marie Altieri*

Lotteries will be needed at the Merriam, Conant and Blanchard schools. Due to the small numbers at Merriam and Conant, Marie hopes that those families will get their first choice eventually. Blanchard has 11 more Acton kindergartener requests than there is space for, and that probably will not change as time

goes by. Seats must be left for future Boxborough students with home town guarantee who move in. At this time, enrollment is 25-30 kindergarten students below projection. Seventeen classes are planned with an average class size of 18.4 students. With currently 66 students who have priority to attend Blanchard's kindergarten, the Administration plans to move one section from Gates (leaving 2 classes) to Blanchard (resulting in 4 kindergarten classes) because 22 students per kindergarten class at this time, in one school, is not acceptable. This is a budget neutral solution. Marie reviewed the details.

Comments from the Committee included:

- With additional Pathways class at Blanchard, how does that affect classroom space at the school? Marie explained that they are looking at the spaces now with this in mind.
- This group of students would always have four sections as they move up, which is not new.
- The enrollment numbers are consistent with last year at this time.
- Final enrollment is not known until October 1 so it is difficult to anticipate the budget impact.

Members had a lengthy discussion about having space constraints at Blanchard while Gates would have extra space, primarily due to the home guarantee granted by the Regional Agreement. Balancing the desire for this guarantee with decisions that will affect education and the budget at Blanchard was a major point. Capping Blanchard at 3 kindergarten sections, would require a discussion about ending the home guarantee. Of the 66 students requesting Blanchard, 54 live in Boxborough, 8 are siblings of current Blanchard students who live in Acton and 2 are Pathways students. The current plan is only taking 4 new families that do not have home town guarantee.

Appendix A of the Regional Agreement says that in extreme circumstances the Superintendent can make placement decisions, although this is not what has been done. It also states that after 5 years the Agreement could be reconsidered, which is now. It was suggested that this topic needs to be considered in the spirit of open enrollment and if we are committed to it. Transportation issues are also a piece.

Mr. Light asked for general direction from the Committee. If the class location decision is postponed for another discussion, the lottery would have to be postponed and families would need to be notified.

Comments included:

- More information is needed.
- Members are just starting to think about this issue.
- Dana Labb and the other principals are supportive of this recommendation and have been part of the discussion, although this is a decision made by the Administration.
- Changing the home town guarantee and/or the sibling priority at the last minute would be inappropriate if the Administration's plan was not supported at this time.
- Opening the new school in 2 years provides room for the entire PreK program and K-6 CASE program. Administrators hope to keep CASE in more than one school. The PreK will free up 2 classrooms at Blanchard.
- Pathways would continue at Blanchard with a full commitment even if 4 kindergartens are there.
- One thought may be to limit new families moving into Acton from going to Blanchard so Acton siblings would decrease in the future. Several members agreed this should be considered.
- Having siblings attending the same school should not be minimized for families.
- This does create great class sizes for our incoming kindergarteners.
- The District does have constraints. We don't guarantee first choice with open enrollment.

Mr. Light reminded the Committee that their decision level on this topic is whether to maintain open enrollment and the home town guarantee per the Regional Agreement. It is the Administration's job to figure out how to make it work.

There was unanimous consensus to support the Administration's decision and continue with the lottery as planned next week. A broader discussion of open enrollment, home town guarantee and the sibling priority will be held at a future meeting.

3.3. Subcommittee and Member Reports

3.3.1. School Building Committee Update –*Peter Light and Marie Altieri*

3.3.1.1. Recommendation to Authorize the Superintendent to Submit to the MSBA the Statement of Interest for the Conant School – **VOTE** – *Peter Light*

The Building Committee meets next week. Honing the architects' revisions has been a focus as well as ensuring that the two story library is functional for both schools. Maya expressed some concern about how to properly staff and divide it, as well as the railings. The project is still on target. Meetings will continue virtually. Achieving the just over 2% bond rate was very timely because rates jumped up right after our sale.

The Statement of Interest for Conant is similar to what has been submitted in previous years. The State is accepting much fewer requests now but submitting it keeps the District in the pipeline. Although the submission deadline has been extended, the Committee was ready to vote. Paul noted that JD Head will correct the box regarding the use of modulars.

Adam Klein moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call:

Having convened in an open meeting on March 19, 2020, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee of Acton and Boxborough, 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 February 3, 2020 for the Luther Conant Elementary School located at 80 Taylor Rd 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 Priority 2 - Elimination of Severe Overcrowding, Priority 5 - Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility, and 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; 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 Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

3.3.2. Budget - *Diane Baum –has not met*

3.3.3. Acton Leadership Group - *Diane Baum/Amy Krishnamurthy – meetings have ended for year* The Acton Finance Committee voted unanimously to support the FY21 School Budget.

3.3.4. Boxborough Leadership Forum – *Tessa McKinley*

The May 11 Town Meeting is not postponed yet. No decision has been made on the March 31 election at this time. The budget was approved.

3.3.5. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) – *Diane Baum/Tessa McKinley*

Diane reported that SEPAC is seeking clarity to ensure that all AB students can access the enrichment opportunities being offered. They will connect with Debbie Dixon regarding how AB team meetings will be done. The proposal for a session at the MASC/MASS conference in November on School Committee/SEPAC partnerships hosted by the ABRSC, SEPAC and the Superintendent has been accepted. Diane noted that AB is considered a leader in this area.

3.4. **Recommendation to Approve \$650 Grants from the Mass Cultural Council to the Jr High – VOTE**

Adam Klein moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call to approve the grants with gratitude.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

4. **Statement of Warrants – none**

5. **FYI**

Mr. Light noted that delaying the local Acton election would also delay the changeover of School Committee members. The next School Committee meeting will be online again. Feedback on the meeting that just took place was requested and should be emailed to the Superintendent with a cc to Beth.

Given the number of questions people have about when things will be happening, it was suggested that a place for calendar updates, even just “it’s in review” be provided. The community coffee webinar with Tessa and Mr. Light was held the previous night and was well attended and appreciated.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Maya Minkin seconded, and it was unanimously

VOTED by roll call to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:12 p.m.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda with list

For Your Information

- Acton and Boxborough 2020 Election Calendars
- 2020-2021 School Calendar with Early Dismissals for JH and HS added, 3/12/20
- CASE Collaborative Family News & Resources Pages, March 2020
- FY21 ABRSC Meeting Dates – *Tessa McKinley*
- Monthly Student Enrollment, *March 1, 2020*
- Kelley’s Corner Public Forum, *March 19th at 7PM, Acton Town Hall 204*

NEXT MEETINGS:

- April 2 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. via zoom webinar
- Acton Town Meeting begins on Monday, April 6 - postponed
- April 16 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m.
- Boxborough Town Meeting begins on Monday, May 11