

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Draft Minutes

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting
To attend: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505>
To call in: 312 626 6799
Live streaming: <https://youtu.be/PhcMsgy0xVE>

May 7, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 9:35 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin (7:45 p.m.), Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Dawn Bentley, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino, Amy Bisiewicz,

1. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 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 the 11 School Committee members, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. Public participation was possible via the zoom link or call in phone number. It was also recorded and being live streamed on youtube. Meetings are posted on Acton TV's website at <http://actontv.org/on-demand/government>. Per the remote policy, all votes were done by roll call with each member stating their vote after the Chairperson called their name.

2. OPEN MEETING

2.1. Chairman's Welcome

Tessa reminded the School Committee members about the protocols that they all agreed to at the beginning of the year. She focused on the need for efficient and effective communication to avoid excessively long meetings. She asked members to be good listeners, and hold questions if they have already been asked.

2.1.1. Annual Spring Town Elections

- Acton and Boxborough's Elections are postponed to June 2. Citizens are being urged to vote early by mail to avoid gathering at the polls. Please see your town website for details.
- Boxborough Annual Town Meeting will be June 22. Acton Town Meeting is not yet determined.

2.2. Public Participation - *none*

2.3. High School Student Representatives Update - *none*

3. PRESENTATION

3.1. School Closure Update – *Peter Light*

1. Distance Learning Update

A significant majority of our stakeholders surveyed are satisfied with the District's program. DESE's guidance shows our work has been well-informed and only small adjustments are needed moving forward. Angie Tso asked if there will be virtual summer school. The district is still waiting for guidance but planning has started on summer school opportunities.

2. High School Quarter 3 Grading

After surveying all involved, reaching out to college admissions offices, gathering High School leadership opinion, reviewing third quarter grade books, and determining legal and policy implications, the decision was made to close all students' grades for the third quarter on a pass/no record basis.

3. Graduation

Thanking the High School Faculty and Administration, Project Graduation, PTSO and Acton Police & Fire Departments, Mr. Light announced that a Rolling Rally and Diploma Distribution will take place on June 5. Virtual ceremonies will take place on June 11 for the Scholarship Ceremony and June 12 for Commencement.

Members' comments and questions included:

- Which standards did the DESE consider important regarding new material to teach? A: DESE sent what they thought was the most critical standard for each grade and we are reviewing and deciding on when/how to do that based on what we have already done or had planned. We will fine tune by grade level and department leader.
- How will you calculate the year end GPA for High School students? A: 50% term 1 and 50% term 2 grades
- Do we know that all seniors have access to a car? A: High School staff is working on that.
- How will we figure out what it means in the distance learning survey that 10-25% of families are having difficulty and how will we address it? A: In an effort to keep the survey brief and encourage people to reply, the question was about general satisfaction, not anything specific.
- How will we check back in with families about this next distance learning step? A: It would not be practical to do a survey so close to the end of the school year, so we will rely on teachers to work with their students and make modifications as needed as they go, as they are now.
- How will students learn any material that they might miss in this final quarter of school with distance learning? A: The first few weeks of school are usually spent reviewing the previous quarter. We know that some students will have missed some material or need reinforcing and we will try to address this in the fall. Planning for summer school is in progress and members will learn more about that at the next meeting.
- How does our families' satisfaction with AB's distance learning methods compare to other districts? A: There is no standard right now and Mr. Light thinks comparable districts are in a relatively similar position. We were ahead with the nonsynchronous learning at AB which is good.
- How will we help our juniors with their college applications in the fall? A: Larry Dorey and Todd Chicko have been talking with many colleges. Teacher recommendations will be a focus more than grades but we will learn more as time goes on. Larry and his staff will do what they can to help make this process as meaningful as possible and give teachers time to write recommendations with concrete examples of students' specific skills. Teacher workshops will be offered.

Angie Tso spoke as member of the public, to express her disappointment with the High School grading decision. Because the survey results from parents and students were close, someone would be disappointed no matter what was decided. In her opinion this decision overlooks students' efforts, especially when they worked very hard in term 3. She would like to see the students be given a choice for how their grade is decided, and let them calculate the grade for the year in the same way for the entire time from August 28 to March 12 (last day in school).

Michael Bo spoke as a member of the public, stating that he was very disappointed with the grading decision as well. He felt that the survey data shows that the decision made is unfair because the majority of parents wanted option 2 giving students a choice of a grade or P/NR. He urged the Administration to listen to the parents. Regarding the GPA calculation, he asked that more analysis be done on ways to calculate this instead of 50% and 50% and to be more fair.

James Dillon spoke from the public asking that the District reconsider the treatment of the term 3 grades. He felt that adequate time had not been spent on this, including models about teachers' concerns. He suggested that mathematical models could be used that would be more fair and offered his professional

assistance. Mr. Light responded that the High School has looked into other models involving point systems and weighted categories but not all teachers use the same methods.

3.2. **Negotiations Update** – *Marie Altieri*

3.2.1. Recommendation to Approve the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Contract – **VOTE**

3.2.2. Recommendation to Approve the Acton Boxborough Office Support Association (ABOSA) Contract – **VOTE**

Marie reviewed the Agreements and the financial summary. These include the same cost of living adjustments as the teachers agreed to. Some of the budget gaps should be covered by hiring lower paid new staff to replace retirees. Marie will ensure that ABOSA members understand Article 32 regarding Transportation correctly. Amy Krishnamurthy noted that the ABOSA negotiations were a very positive collaborative effort and she appreciated the work that members and Marie put into it. The attendance bonus for custodians was added to try to improve this group’s attendance, particularly given how expensive it is to pay overtime when they are out and need shift coverage.

John Petersen moved,

“that the ABRSC approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees AFL-CIO, Massachusetts State Council 93 #1703 (AFSCME) and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023 as set forth in the Memorandum of Agreement.”

Ginny Kremer seconded.

John noted that despite the school closure, both unions’ members continued negotiations on zoom. As a result, it made sense that the financial assumptions that went into the ABEA process should not be changed for ABOSA or AFSCME. All three contracts are appropriately aligned from an internal equity perspective.

Members **VOTED by Roll Call** and the motion was unanimously approved.

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

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

VOTED by roll call: that the ABRSC approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Acton-Boxborough Office Support Association and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023 as set forth in the Memorandum of Agreement.

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

4. **NEW BUSINESS**

4.1. **Budget Update** – *Dave Verdolino*

4.1.1. FY20 3rd Quarter Update

Dave reported and referred members to his memo with the April 16th School Committee meeting material for detail. There have been no major financial changes since then.

4.1.2. Reimbursements – Possible **VOTE** - Marie

Marie reviewed the revolving accounts and reasons to consider some refunds. The budget subcommittee discussed how some families will need these refunds financially while there are probably some that would donate the amount to the District so the subcommittee recommended giving families the option.

Paul Murphy moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: that the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee waive the tuition for the months of April, May, and June for the ABRSD All Day Kindergarten Program and the

Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program, and to prorate the high school parking fee.

Additionally, the ABRSD is instructed to process refunds of any funds paid above these amounts after the option is provided to donate the funds to the associated revolving accounts with the understanding that the expenses related to the programs are still incurred.

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

In response to a question from the public, Mr. Light confirmed that the district would continue to employ part time special education assistants for elementary classes.

4.1.3. FY21 Update and Process

Dave reviewed the alternative procedures if a Town Meeting does not happen prior to June 30th. By June 1, the Superintendent must request approval for 1/12th budget authority and this would continue until FY21 budgets are approved by both towns. This provides a legal authority for the school to spend money beyond June 30th. John Petersen pointed out that cash flow during this time is also important. Acton revenues are holding up for the current period and 1/12 will work for the schools because most contracts are 10 months and our cash flow needs in July and August are pretty low. Dave generally agreed but added that there is a debt payment due in July and a Middlesex Retirement payment also in July that will have to be figured into our summer cash flow.

In response to a member's question, Marie confirmed that with the Committee's vote of the FY21 budget, decisions regarding All Day Kindergarten (ADK) have been made for next year. Decisions about ADK FY22 will be made next year after reviewing the fund balances and financial information at that time, particularly given the changing environment we are currently in.

4.2. **Policy Subcommittee** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

4.2.1. Graduation Requirements, File: IKF, **Second Read** – VOTE - *Deborah Bookis*

Adam Klein moved to accept the policy IKF as provided in the packet. Amy Krishnamurthy seconded.

Diane Baum asked to make a friendly amendment given that she had emailed input earlier that day. She requested that an introductory paragraph be added to the beginning of the policy to explain what the requirements mean to High School students regarding the tenants of MassCore. Diane read her paragraph. Paul Murphy seconded the friendly amendment.

Although this was the first time she was hearing this suggestion, Deborah Bookis agreed that the proposed revision does align our policy more closely with MassCore. It was suggested that given this was a substantial addition to the policy, it should go back to the policy subcommittee for review and Larry Dorey should also be asked for comment.

Paul Murphy withdrew his second and Diane Baum withdrew her friendly amendment. Amy Krishnamurthy withdrew her second and Adam Klein withdrew his original motion. The revision will be sent back to the policy subcommittee.

4.3. **Update on the Financial Position of EDCO Collaborative** – *Peter Light (oral)*

Mr. Light reported that EDCO has some serious financial concerns. At the recent Board of Directors meeting it was voted to approve increasing each district's assessment to pay off the FY20 deficit that was mentioned at the previous meeting. This will provide the cash flow that EDCO needs to obtain their fall grants. Lexington has notified EDCO that they will leave the collaborative. This will not happen immediately as it is a long process. In response to a question, Mr. Light said he thought they were leaving because they feel they are not taking advantage of all of the services that EDCO offers, but he is not sure. EDCO has made some drastic changes to help address their financial situation including program realignment for next year, and they are aggressively recruiting for their special education programs. The

school closure situation has made their situation very difficult. Dave Verdolino also attended some of the recent meetings as well.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

5.1. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 4/16/20 and 4/30/20 (open meeting),

A member clarified a sentence in the fifth paragraph on page 3 of the minutes of 4/16/20.

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

VOTED by roll call: to approve the minutes of 4/16 as amended and 4/30 as written.

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

5.2. ABRSC Leadership Transition for FY21 Preliminary Discussion – Tessa McKinley

5.2.1. School Committee Annual Organizational Meeting Policy, File: BDA

Both of the Town Clerks have been consulted regarding the processing of swearing in School Committee members who are elected on June 2nd. Boxborough Town Clerk reports that she can swear new members in the day after the election, however Acton's bylaws state that swearing in does not take place until after the Annual Town Meeting. Regarding School Committee leadership, the Regional Agreement states that the Chair and Vice-Chairs are elected at the first meeting following the latest town election, which could mean after June 30 given that Acton has not rescheduled their Meeting yet. More information about this will be provided at the next meeting, but school attorney Colby Brunt advises that the School Committee could vote to delay the reorganization meeting until after Acton Town Meeting acknowledging that this is would be a change to what the Regional Agreement says, but understandable given the circumstances. She also advised that policy BDA be revised to reflect the Regional Agreement wording.

Tessa asked members to think about how the Committee decides to reorganize, including the nomination process and how members express interest in the next year's commitments. The Chairperson position brings with it a lot of responsibility and Tessa stressed that as a committee they need to be truly intentional about what they want their leader to do. It shouldn't be based just on seniority or who speaks up first. She suggested that members who might be interested in serving as Chair or Vice-Chair, should speak about their interest and then the nomination process could be based on that at the next meeting. This two-step process would allow members to learn more about candidates' intentions and desires before having to decide.

Members talked about various ways that this could be handled between now and when Acton Town Meeting is held. An initial suggestion about having outgoing members resign, creating the need to fill the open seats was dismissed due to the complications. Several members liked the two-step approach to choosing leadership, especially if it leads to the best leadership. Several did not mind how long a chairperson held the office.

Members discussed the unwritten general practice of alternating Acton and Boxborough chairs (two years of Acton chairs followed by one year of a Boxborough chair). Of some concern was "protecting Boxborough's leadership", given that Acton members could outvote Boxborough members due to the weighted voting. There was some initial sentiment that this was not a great concern for the Committee at this particular time and it might make sense to have flexibility. Other members wanted to ensure that the process was fair.

It was agreed that other nominating and voting methods should be considered by the Committee, including ranked voting. Members could ask other districts, or even at the Round Table meeting, although regional school districts are different. Tessa thanked the Committee for their input.

5.3. Subcommittee and Member Reports

5.3.1. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light

5.3.1.1. Minutes of meeting on 4/22/20

Initial thoughts about the budget were discussed at the recent meeting. Cost estimates came back about 5% over budget (\$5M). The Committee will be reviewing where the overruns are coming from: 1. The foot bridge between Douglas and Gates is \$2.5M (\$2M more) 2. Some initial assumptions around storage of soil were found to be not possible. The space was needed for kids, so the materials couldn't be stored on the school property. 3. Additional organic soils need to be investigated. While it is early in the process, the \$5M delta has to be addressed.

5.3.2.Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – Tessa McKinley

BLF will meet on May 12 for the Pre-Town Meeting meeting. May 19th is Candidates Night.

5.3.3.Budget Subcommittee – Diane Baum

Members discussed how Covid-19 is impacting budget and much of it has been reported by Dave. Diane attended the Acton Fincom meeting. Peter, Marie and Dave did an excellent presentation and answered many questions. Revenues in Acton are pretty stable. They are working hard on the hit that reserves will take. The Fincom has revised their Point of View document since Covid. They have a strong statement that we are heading into a recession and should limit budget growth.

5.3.4. Health Insurance Trust – John Petersen

The Trust met April 30th. Expenses through nine months were \$14.2 million against income of \$12.9 million for a loss of \$1.3 million. For FY20, the projected loss is slightly larger but does not reflect the uncertainty of claims in Apr-June related to COVID-19 or reinsurance recoveries. Costs associated with treatment of COVID-19 might increase the expenses of the Trust but reductions in participants seeking care and scheduling elective surgery are likely to be larger. Significant reinsurance recoveries are also expected. The unrestricted assets of the Trust are expected to be about \$5 million at yearend which is equivalent to about 25% of annual expenses. The Trustees renewed our Service Contract with Cook & Company as well as our contract for a part-time service representative helping district and town employees with health benefits. The Trustees also approved the request for proposal for stop loss insurance (reinsurance) to protect the Trust against losses related to large claims which are claims per participant greater than \$125K.

Ginny Kremer reported on her meeting with MASC and Senator Edward Markey regarding the next level of hopeful federal relief. Diane Baum was also on the call. Ginny liked his explanation that this might not break along party lines because it will affect all states.

6. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – Tessa McKinley**

Because this was a new process for reviewing the warrants, there was an extensive list.

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

VOTED by roll call:

that the School Committee vote to approve:

Payroll warrants as follows –

Number P2019	dated 3/12/20	in the amount of \$2,671,961.90,
Number P2020	dated 3/26/20	in the amount of \$2,647,722.64,
Number P2021	dated 4/9/20	in the amount of \$2,613,947.97,
and Number P2022	dated 4/23/20	in the amount of \$2,575,753.38;

Payroll deduction warrants as follows –

Number 20-019PR	dated 3/12/20	in the amount of \$ 533,799.00,
Number 20-020PR	dated 3/26/20	in the amount of \$1,079,510.06,
Number 20-021PR	dated 4/9/20	in the amount of \$ 525,390.86,
and Number 20-022PR	dated 4/23/20	in the amount of \$1,064,914.25;

Vendor warrants as follows –

Number 20-019	dated 3/19/20	in the amount of \$ 529,928.02,
---------------	---------------	---------------------------------

Number 20-020 dated 4/2/20 in the amount of \$1,610,681.91,
Number 20-021 dated 4/16/20 in the amount of \$1,162,607.30,
and Number 20-022 dated 4/30/20 in the amount of \$1,452,422.98;

Student Activity Fund Reimbursements as follows –
Number 20-019B2 dated 3/11/20 in the amount of \$ 793.84,
Number 20-019BL dated 3/12/20 in the amount of \$ 1,827.48,
Number 20-019JH dated 3/12/20 in the amount of \$31,428.62,
and Number 20-022SH dated 3/12/20 in the amount of \$26,787.76.

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

7. **FYI** – Two changes in School Committee meeting dates were noted:
- next meeting is now May 21 – changed from May 20
 - first June meeting is now June 4 – changed from June 11
 - final meeting is unchanged and will be June 18

8. **Adjourn**

John Petersen moved to adjourn. Paul Murphy seconded.

As this was Teacher Appreciation Week, Adam Klein thanked all of the amazing teachers, aides and staff in the district for their patience and grace. Amy Krishnamurthy especially thanked all of the High School staff who drove through the towns in last weekend's car parade for the seniors. Committee members agreed.

It was **VOTED by roll call** to adjourn at 9:45 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda with list