

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Approved 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/C5AEtAlbkF4>

Executive Session is not open to the public

May 21, 2020

6:30 p.m. Executive Session

7:00 p.m. Open Business Meeting

Members Present: Michael Bo, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (7:00 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine (left at 9:15 p.m.), Angie Tso

Members Absent: Diane Baum

Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis (7:00 p.m.), Dawn Bentley (7:00 p.m.), Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino (7:00 p.m.), Amy Bisiewicz (7:00 p.m.), Heather Haines (7:00 p.m.), David Lawrence (7:00 p.m.)

1. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:38 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 10 of the School Committee members with Diane Baum absent, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. Public participation was possible via the zoom link or call in phone number. The open meeting 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. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 6:42 p.m., the Chair stated the need for an executive session to be convened under M.G.L. c. 30A, sect. 21(a)(7) to comply with a general law, to wit, M.G.L. c. 268A, sect. 23(c)(2) AND M.G.L. c. 30A, sect. 21(a) purpose 7 to comply with or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements - M.G.L. c. 30A, sect. 22(f) to consider approval of the executive session minutes of April 30, 2020. She stated that the Committee would return to open meeting at approximately 7:00.

Amy Krishnamurthy made the motion, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call. (YES: Bo, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

3. OPEN MEETING

At 7:00 p.m., the Committee returned to open meeting.

3.1. Chairman's Welcome

- Annual Spring Town Elections will be held on June 2 - Citizens are being urged to vote early by mail to avoid gathering at the polls. Please see the town websites for details.
- Boxborough Annual Town Meeting will be June 22. Acton Town Meeting will be June 29.

3.2. Public Participation - none

3.3. High School Student Representatives Update

Charles Wang and Michael Cheng reported that things are running at a much smoother pace. They noted that the teachers and staff deserve thanks and recognition for their efforts. In particular, teachers are gathering a lot of feedback about how to make zoom learning a better experience next time. As a senior,

Michael thanked everyone, in the school and larger community, for acknowledging and responding to the seniors' end of the year. The usual election of next year's School Committee reps has not been held. Tessa and the Superintendent thanked Michael for his years of service to the Committee and wished him well.

4. PRESENTATION

4.1. School Closure Update – *Peter Light*

Thanking District Management Group (DMG) for their assistance and ongoing consultation, Mr. Light shared his thinking about reopening of the schools. He described the current phase as “digging into the yeoman’s part of the work to reopen”. DESE guidance is not expected until late June at best. He predicted a “prolonged period of modified school structures” and expects it to take significant time to “recover lost learning”. AB plans to use a Public-Health Informed Approach that could include modified on-campus time, distance learning and a hybrid model. Team framework will include a Steering Committee made up of four working groups: School/District Operations, Human Resources/Finance, Instructional Core/SEL, and Stakeholders/Communication.

While traditional school planning takes 12-18 months to initiate and implement a change, the “agile” plan needed today calls for 100 days of initial planning/implementation followed by another 100 days of monitoring and improving. A School Committee member is needed on the Steering Committee as well as one for the Stakeholders and Communication Working Group. Steering plans to meet weekly starting now until the Fall. Working Group will meet twice a week.

Committee discussion included:

- Great plan but a significant commitment by lots of people in the district. What will you take off their plates to focus on this critical work? Mr. Light responded that unfortunately there is little that can be removed, but he wants to be sure that administrators get a break over the summer. They might team up with other districts for discussions so brainstorming is broader.
- We might need to consider adding more incremental phases to the second 100 days because the virus could return very quickly and we would have to adjust.
- The budget includes covid-related expenses like deep cleaning of the buildings and equipment to maintain student health. Some of the cost of work required to bring students back and distance learning expenses may be reimbursed by the federal CARES Act.
- Will the Parent Communication Map be updated given the new communication channels? Maybe, the Communications Group will plan this. One of their first jobs will be to create a survey to capture what people are worried about right now. Members will code the input and feedback.
- The Superintendent was urged to “find the minimal viable product” in business terms, because we don’t know what the roadblocks will be. Mr. Light agreed referring to the quote regarding agile planning that “perfect is the enemy of the good”.
- This framework has our equity core values built in. This was difficult when we closed the school. Mr. Light noted that the district was cited by the state specifically for how our plans addressed equity. Deborah Bookis added that representation from all groups were included from the beginning to get all of the different perspectives. A great outcome is that teachers are learning the universal design for learning (UDL) framework and with lots of different tools from the beginning. All activities are accessible for all of our students.
- When school reopens, how will we do social distancing with the students? We are working on that but there are many things to consider. We are looking at how other countries have done it, schedules, desk arrangements, etc. for possible best practices. State guidance will be needed but is not expected until end of June. The big unknown is that everything keeps changing.

Mr. Light’s current thinking is that we need to have a good distance learning plan and plan to be on campus some of the time in the fall. The state may decide on one model for everyone when school starts, but this is his gut feeling. One consideration is that our staff doesn’t all live in Acton and Boxborough so our schedule

has to synch with other districts and some kind of coordination is needed. Administrators have talked about identifying the areas that we can control and be sure to plan for those first. For example, we can control the teaching and learning, but don't know when we will return to campus.

Committee members who are interested in volunteering for one of the two new groups should contact Tessa. When asked if a new member who won't be sworn in until July could volunteer, Mr. Light said that he would defer that question to the School Committee.

4.2. K-8 Mathematics 2020-2021 – *Deborah Bookis, Heather Haines, David Lawrence*

The staff is looking forward to having one program that will build grade-level understandings/equitable learning experiences for our K-8 students. It fits extremely well with AB's core values of wellness, equity and engagement and our district goals of inclusive practices and Social Emotional Learning. Illustrative Mathematics (IM) is one of the highest rated math programs. As an open source product, it is free (except for consumables and optional online resources). IM "shines" in how accessible it is for students and how useable it is for teachers.

Committee discussion included:

- Members were very excited about this new program.
- When asked why it is free, it was explained that a nonprofit called Open Up Resources creates open source resources for schools so the schools can spend their money on professional learning. They put out a call for math curriculum and IM won the bid in part because they are also a nonprofit.
- A member liked the unified content across all of the schools, but given that each of our elementary school has their own culture, he asked if there is a way for schools to customize the program to keep their own culture. Deborah confirmed that the program does lend itself to this type of variation.
- The core program provides high quality materials so the teacher can think about how to teach it to his/her own students. Teachers make the educational decisions based on knowing their kids.
- The program incorporates things from other programs too so teachers see some that are familiar.
- The flexibility that is built in to accommodate learning styles is great, but you also need an organizational structure for all schools to be sure you have equitable resources to meet kids' needs.
- Abstract thinking in math was considered. Different aged kids have different abilities in this area. We want kids to think deeply about math and IM does that. The example members were given had 4 right answers, but they had to explain why they chose the right answer that they did.
- For a future meeting, how do you take a common tool like this and adjust it to different students' paces and learning styles? Instead of learning styles, Deborah preferred to think about what the students' strengths are and how we can support them. In her opinion, it is a misnomer about having a style and only being taught that one way.

A member of the public asked how IM is different from the traditional method, and how it is better. Heather replied that the IM structure has students working on problems and the teacher is a facilitator. It is a way to be sure that students are getting "the big idea". IM facilitates the conversation.

4.3. FY20 Superintendent Evaluation – *Tessa McKinley, Peter Light*

4.3.1. Final Report on Goals

Mr. Light reported that because his mid-year update was done one week prior to the school closure on March 13th, most of his attention has been focused on immediate issues related to closure. Although he and his leadership team had hoped to be further along with work on the goals, he added updates to his mid-year report. As noted in his memo, the need for a robust system of social and emotional support will be even greater in the fall, as well as developing a system of support and unified vision for early literacy. It will be critical to engage stakeholders to build trust and consensus for what school will be like in the fall. Deborah Bookis and Dawn Bentley also commented on the important work coming up.

Not being able to complete the district strategy is one of the most frustrating things for Mr. Light. A workshop was scheduled for 3 days before the closure and because it would not work well on zoom, it

was put on hold. Because they want an equity lens on their efforts, they reached out to the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) and had hoped to discuss this feedback at the workshop. This will happen after the new School Committee is in place now. We continue to work with District Management Group regarding social emotional supports to help us align our educators and be more efficient in how we support our students. Mr. Light reported that almost the entire year was spent working with our educators on evaluation. Many educators reported positive consequences and said that they were aligned. Mr. Light concluded that in his opinion, closure activities were also appropriate for members to comment on in his evaluation.

Comments from the Committee included:

- Was any kind of comprehensive assessment done about what we are doing regarding literacy, as we did for mathematics? Deborah Bookis replied that a survey did not go out but information was gathered by the subcommittee working on evidence based resources and different practices. This helped inform what recommendations going forward. Although this was done informally, they made sure to include representation from all of the schools.
- How should we think of these goals now, given the attention that needs to be paid to opening a clean school in the fall? Should they be postponed for a year? Mr. Light explained that the things we want to do in the district strategy have not changed, but how they are prioritized will have to. Previously, we planned a multi-year process regarding literacy, mathematics and social emotional work, but after the closure, this has become a number one priority. When we get to do a workshop, prioritizing our goals will be an important discussion.
- It was clarified that educator evaluation is a goal in the next strategic plan, not this year's. It was noted that we did say that increasing our teachers of color was important and we did end up hiring so many that we met the goal in the first year.
- How have we helped students deal with the impact of having to stay home due to Covid? Our counselors reach out to all students. We provide a lot of information to families and coordinate with the social workers and youth officers in both towns. These are just a few examples. A survey of community needs was given to families and anyone that mentioned a resource was forwarded to staff to connect.
- Several members talked about "labeling" kids, and asked about the district's philosophy regarding how to solve that issue - Are we trying to removing challenges, or are we helping them solve the problem? How will our kids be able to conquer the challenges they face? Dawn Bentley answered that the district does both. We want to push kids as far as possible, but at the same time provide the supports they need to access the challenge. A member added that in the age of multiple intelligences, some students perform well with certain curriculum and as a result, they do not explore other intelligences that might be valuable to them - Don't let kids self-label.

4.3.2. Public Request for Input by June 5

Tessa reminded the public and Committee members that their comments and input should be sent to her and Secretary Beth Petr at Tmckinley@abschools.org and Bpetr@abschools.org by June 5.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1. Policy Subcommittee – Amy Krishnamurthy (met on 5/14/20)

5.1.1. Graduation Requirements, File: IKF, **Third Read – VOTE**

This policy was postponed until the next meeting on June 4.

5.1.2. First Readings

5.1.2.1. Use of Facilities, File: KF – The Friends of Lower Field no longer do the scheduling.

5.1.2.2. Policy Development, File: BG – This would permit the policy subcommittee to make small edits such as typographical errors, title changes or a word or two without a first or second read and vote of the Committee. The Committee would be notified.

5.1.2.3. Annual Organizational Meeting, File: BDA –

This change was proposed because new Boxborough members are sworn in after the election, and Acton's members are sworn in after Annual Town Meeting ends, per the Town Charter.

Much of the previous meeting's discussion about the voting of officers was considered procedural. The policy subcommittee recommended that voting be done at one meeting, not over two, to avoid the possibility of the appearance of members campaigning, and to ensure that all discussions would be in the open meeting. Procedures will be drafted by the policy subcommittee and brought to School Committee for consideration when policy BDA is voted on June 4. Any comments or input should be sent before the meeting to Amy, Tessa and cc to Beth.

6. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

6.1. **Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 5/7/2020**

John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the minutes of 5/7/20 as amended in the packet.

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

6.2. **Budget Update – Dave Verdolino (This was taken out of order after EDCO)**

6.2.1. FY21 Recommended Budget Revisions – Possible **VOTE** to Approve*

Dave reviewed the proposed changes from the Administration. A gross adjustment of a decrease of \$1,008,067 was offset by adding back \$500,000 in contingency for a net recommended adjustment to the FY21 proposed budget of -\$508,067. Several members commented that the \$500,000 contingency was smart given all of the uncertainties that exist.

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

VOTED by roll call: That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 be set at \$96,912,701, and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$65,584,049 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$5,325,309 and an Operating Assessment of \$60,258,741); and

Boxborough \$12,123,116 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$878,800 and an Operating Assessment of \$11,244,315);

With the remainder to be accounted for by the following sources of funds:

Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$15,345,811,

Anticipated Chapter 71, Section 16C Transportation Aid of \$2,097,225,

Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$50,000,

Anticipated Medicaid Reimbursement of \$250,000,

Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$300,000,

Estimated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$17,500, and

Transfer from E&D Reserve in the amount of \$1,145,000.

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

6.2.2. Recommendation to authorize the Superintendent, if applicable, to expend funds approved through the authorization of a so-called "one-twelfth budget" for the District by the Department of Revenue – **VOTE**

Now that Acton and Boxborough have both set Town Meetings before the end of June, this may not be needed. The deadline to apply is June 1 however, so he recommends doing it just in case.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to authorize the Superintendent, if applicable, to expend funds approved through the authorization of a so-called "one-twelfth budget" for the District by the Department of Revenue.
(YES: Bo, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Tso)

6.3. Update on the Financial Position of EDCO Collaborative – Peter Light (taken before Budget Update)
Mr. Light thanked EDCO Executive Director Nadine Ekstrom for attending the meeting if there were any questions. Mr. Light shared some recent meeting discussions and concerns about EDCO regarding several districts that were withdrawing (3) or considering withdrawing from the collaborative and the financial health of the organization. One district has suggested that a vote be taken to terminate EDCO.

Although he is satisfied with how this is being handled, Mr. Light wanted to keep the Committee informed. If a district withdraws they are still financially liable for what happened while they were a member. Members discussed materials in the packet including a legal opinion from our attorney the risk to the district, and spreadsheet of EDCO Estimated Closing Costs. This spreadsheet does not account for OPEB so it is not totally complete, but a start, and shows a termination cost of \$6.5M. Other things like long-term contracts would need confirming so numbers will change. If EDCO is terminated, districts would have to vote this fiscal year and terminate at the end of FY21. Our share of the liability would be in the high hundreds of thousands of dollars. Mr. Light feels we should try to support EDCO and not take on this liability at the time. An immediate danger of continuing, is an additional assessment if EDCO does not have a balanced budget. Dr. Ekstrom and her staff are doing everything they can in Mr. Light's opinion and he would prefer a risk of staying and possibly incurring a \$20,000 additional assessment to a multi-hundred thousand dollar liability if we terminate.

Members asked why some districts are leaving and what the remaining ones think. Mr. Light thought most of the remaining members are supportive although some of the superintendents have to discuss it with their School Committees before speaking. He expects to know more in two weeks. Dr. Ekstrom had a similar impression and noted that EDCO has been in business for 51 years, and is the second oldest collaborative in the state. AB pays a 7.5% assessment, and is one of the largest districts in the group.

A member said that it is important to consider the value and importance of the collaborative and what it offers the students who need the services it provides. Members also attend the roundtable meetings and other opportunities that EDCO provides.

Mr. Light asked if the Committee would like this item on a future School Committee agenda for a vote to terminate or withdraw from the Collaborative. It was the sense of the Committee that they would like further discussion to decide to affirm the District's participation or withdrawal.

6.4. Subcommittee and Member Reports

6.4.1. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light

6.4.1.1. Minutes of meeting on 4/29/20

Geothermal wells are being tested. The Value Management Report is finalized to the appropriate amount, and to the MSBA for approval. Design development is at the MSBA for their review and comment. The work of the OPM, Architect and committee members to bring the price down without affecting the project, was commended.

6.4.2. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) –Amy Krishnamurthy (5/20/20)

Mr. Light shared the budget information just reported, followed by the Town's report. Next meeting is June 4. Town Meeting has now been set for June 29 with a limited agenda.

6.4.3. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – Tessa McKinley

BLF met on the 12th for preTown Meeting planning and details about set up for June 22.

6.4.4. Capital Improvements Subcommittee – *Adam Klein (5/11/20)*

The results of the recent bond sale were reviewed and were quite favorable. Having money now is beneficial because we can prepay some capital projects and do them this year. Redesign of the HVAC controls at Blanchard and the Jr High paving have been done. Charter Road paving is the next big project.

6.4.5. Budget Subcommittee – *Peter/Dave (5/19/20)*

Based on the previous budget subcommittee meeting discussion, Mr. Light and Dave shared tonight's budget information with the Acton Finance committee on Tuesday.

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

Tessa McKinley moved, Ginny Kremer seconded, and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to approve:

Payroll warrant(s) as follows –

Number P2023 dated 5/07/20 in the amount of \$2,646,742.90;

Payroll deduction warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-023PR dated 5/07/20 in the amount of \$ 529,811.49;

Vendor warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-023 dated 5/14/20 in the amount of \$ 943,454.85;

Student Activity Fund Reimbursement(s) as follows –

Number 20-023BL dated 5/07/20 in the amount of \$ 16,515.00.

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

8. **FYI**

9. **Adjourn**

Ginny Kremer moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to adjourn at 10:16 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda with list

NEXT MEETINGS:

- **June 4** – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. (changed from June 11)
- June 18 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m.