

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

June 18, 2020

To attend: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505>

6:00 p.m. Executive Session

To call in: 312 626 6799

7:00 p.m. (approximately) Business Meeting

Live streaming: <https://youtu.be/0rU3VDnOzUo>

Executive Session is not open to the public

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (arrived 6:10 p.m), Diane Baum, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (absent 6:10 – 6:20 p.m., left at 7:00 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen (absent 7:08 – 7:50 p.m.), 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** (6:00)

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

Due to the schools being closed as a result of the coronavirus, the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar with all 11 of the School Committee members, per 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**

Tessa stated the need for an Executive Session to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21(a) purpose (3): to discuss strategy with respect to litigation because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee. She said that the Committee would return to open meeting at approximately 7:00.

Paul Murphy made the motion and Adam Klein seconded it. The Committee unanimously **VOTED by Roll Call**. (YES: Baum, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

3. **RETURN to OPEN MEETING** at 7:10 p.m.

Tessa thanked the public for waiting while the Committee was in executive session.

3.1. Chairman's Welcome

3.1.1. Thank you to Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy and Michael Bo for serving on the Committee.

Members shared their deep appreciation and gratitude for the 17 total years of service that Maya, Paul and Michael have given to the District in so many ways. Mr. Light also thanked them saying "You have students at your core". They will be missed.

3.1.2. Annual Town Meetings for Boxborough and Acton will both be June 29th.

3.2. Public Participation – *none*

3.3. High School Student Representatives Update – *none*

3.4. School Closure Update – *Peter Light*

Mr. Light thanked the Committee for their support during the closure. He especially thanked the High School administration and staff and the parents for their efforts to make graduation so special for the

seniors and their families. The elementary principals were also thanked for all of their work as well sending off their students.

The Administration is still waiting for guidance from the state re what school might look like in the fall. It will take 2-3 weeks for the team to put together a plan once the guidance comes out. A transition website will be set up so there is one place for families to find all of the information. The state has been trending to the positive regarding the virus, so Mr. Light is hopeful that the buildings will be open, but no one knows.

A couple of weeks ago, the leadership team sent out a letter expressing support for the protests taking place. Much of the feedback thanked them for the words, but asked what their action will be to combat racism. A lot of the language in our strategy is about building inclusive schools and after much discussion, the leadership team has decided to take the next step and pivot from focusing only on being inclusive to becoming explicitly anti-racist in our approach to how we want to build a culture in our schools and community. The premise of being anti-racist is that you cannot choose to be neutral. Our team has chosen to be much more proactive about this, acknowledging that we are in the middle of a pandemic with many unknowns as planning starts to welcome students back. Work will be done over the summer and more will be shared in the fall. An anonymous reporting system will be created to ensure that we know what is taking place and have the right data. The Family Advisory Group for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion will be reconvened. They will meet over the summer to review our policies and some curriculum to be sure it is anti-racist and anti-biased. Professional learning will also be provided to our staff on the topics. The leadership team also intends to have a district-wide staff discussion of How to Be an Antiracist by Ibrahm X. Kendi. A memo has been sent out to all families explaining these new efforts.

Angie Tso was happy to learn about this new initiative. Noting that while the chaos of the virus is taking place and society is calling for changes, this is a great opportunity for education. She asked what perspective do we want our students to learn from this. Besides our core values of equity, inclusiveness, and wellness, how do we build the foundations of empathy, kindness, patience, and love? What kind of mindset do we want to build our students and react to any event? Do we encourage or allow different perspectives? Many students need stability in times of uncertainty. Angie asked that our students' wellness and safety remain our priorities. Tessa thanked her for centering what will be the work this summer and next year.

Several members thanked the administration for heading in the right direction as a community. Evelyn Abayaah-Issah suggested that we examine our recruitment process and how to attract staff of color. She advocated for finding a counselor of color so that kids of color can see people who understand them. She reported that some kids feel like they are being watched when they gather in groups. The kids all want to feel like they belong. Mr. Light agreed and said that he and Marie Altieri have been working on staff recruitment and plan to report more information in the fall. One new step is that we are now asking candidates to self identify if they wish, and then gather the data so we can have targeted solutions. We can watch who is applying and getting interviewed.

4. PRESENTATION

4.1. **Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) Report** – *Amanda Bailey, Carrie Weaver*

Amanda Bailey presented on the SEPAC's mission and role. All of their 2019-2020 Priorities have been met, with the exception of "Monitor PowerSchool access and Extended School Year programming", which is ongoing. There were many opportunities for engagement and relationship building, as well as outreach and education. Feedback was solicited from families and 12 staff members were recognized for their efforts during the school closure. Important work was done to develop recommendations for the identification of dyslexia and corresponding interventions. This work has been shared around the country. SEPAC has also been very involved in helping their families and meeting with the administration during the pandemic. Families were urged to complete the recent surveys. Special thanks

were given to Bill Guthlein for over a decade of service to families, and to Paul Murphy for being the SEPAC liaison for many years. Tessa thanked Amanda and the SEPAC for all of their important efforts.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1. Proposed ABRSC Resolution Regarding Covid-19 State Funding – **VOTE** – Tessa McKinley

Tessa read the resolution as proposed by MASC noting that over 40 districts have accepted this already. John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to adopt the motion as read with deletion of the word “enormous”.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

5.2. Proposed ABRSC Resolution Regarding The Response to Social, Economic and Racial Justice in our Communities – **VOTE** – Tessa McKinley

Tessa read the resolution, also proposed by MASC. Angie Tso suggested that the following be added, “including those that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of our towns;”.

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

VOTED by Roll Call: to approve the resolution as amended by Angie.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

5.3. Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) Side Letter to Change the November 3, 2020 Professional Day to Friday August 28, 2020 – **VOTE** – Marie Altieri

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

VOTED by Roll Call: that the ABRSC approve the ABEA side letter to change the Nov 3, 2020 professional day to August 28, 2020.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

6. ONGOING BUSINESS

6.1. Superintendent’s Annual Summative Review – Tessa McKinley

6.1.1. *Motion:* Move to Accept the Annual Summative Review for Superintendent Peter Light dated 6/18/20 as presented/amended – **VOTE**

Tessa reported that members completed their evaluations and she compiled them into the summative review, which she read. The public was invited to comment prior to the deadline, but no one did.

Members’ comments included:

- It was quite a year and the true test of a leader.
- Members are so grateful that Peter was here and led us in the manner that he has.
- Of critical importance was Peter’s willingness to be personally vulnerable. A lot of discussion relates to people not being able to look at themselves. Peter is very straight up about that.
- Peter really cares about how things impact the students.
- He is not afraid of challenges and disagreements.
- He communicates with the community and all of the members very effectively.

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

VOTED by Roll Call: that the ABRSC accept the annual summative review for Superintendent Peter Light dated 6/18/2020 as presented.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

Mr. Light thanked Tessa for her hard work this year. He noted that while it is often the superintendent who is talking, it is the team that does the work – the central office staff, principals, assistant principals, coaches, educators, and curriculum specialists. The last three months have been some of the most challenging of our leaders’ lives. The amount of change, and the volume of work

in an ever-shifting landscape has required so much of our leaders, coupled with everything else going on in the world. He wanted to thank everyone publicly, including the School Committee.

6.1.2. Discussion of Superintendent's FY21 Salary

As next year's budget was being finalized this spring and the potential of the financial issues became clear, Mr. Light requested no increase to his salary. Emphasizing that this would not at all be a reflection of his performance, a zero increase was built into the FY21 budget. As a follow up to the annual evaluation, members must vote the Superintendent's annual salary and record it on the addendum in his contract.

Given Mr. Light's skillful and caring leadership during this very difficult past year, members were torn about giving him no salary increase. Everyone was extremely grateful for Mr. Light's generous offer. Comments included:

- Three union contracts were settled at 1.5% just before the pandemic hit. Mr. Light should be given that amount as a minimum.
- It would be nice to give him the recognition of a salary increase.
- He deserves a raise and FY22 will be even harder financially than FY21. It would be terrible to offer no increase for 2 years in a row.
- As part of the budget process, a number of options were considered. In consultation, with Mr. Light, a decision was made that the Superintendent's salary would not increase. This was done as leadership, not as a measure of performance. It sets a tone that the district and its leadership are taking the financial situation very seriously.
- We should accept Peter's generous and thoughtful offer with gratitude understanding that it is not about his performance, but a reflection of the instability of the times. We should use it as a statement - that it is for the betterment of the district in uncertain times.
- A 1.5% increase would be approximately \$3,000 and while it is not trivial because we now have to duplicate supplies and purchase virus protection and have other expenses, at what point is it trivial. Although very torn, this member was leaning toward keeping the salary as is with a clear message that it was no reflection on performance.
- During the 2009 recession, the Committee and Superintendent agreed on no salary increase, for financial reasons. Over time, when the environment improves, the Committee could revisit the Superintendent's salary and address an equity issue. Several members appreciated this point.

6.1.3. *Motion:* Move to set the Superintendent's salary at \$XXXX for FY21 and record the FY21 salary in Addendum I of Mr. Light's contract – **VOTE**

John Petersen moved to make no change to the Superintendent's salary for FY21 as a reflection of the challenging financial times and the gracious offer of the Superintendent to accept no raise this year. Paul Murphy seconded the motion.

Adam Klein made a friendly amendment to add, "with recognition that it has no reflection on Peter's performance and strong dedication to the district" to the end of the motion. John and Paul both agreed to the amendment. The Committee unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call and approved the amended motion.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

6.2. **Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes** of 6/4/2020

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

VOTED by Roll Call: to approve the minutes of 6/4/20.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

6.3. Budget Update – Dave Verdolino

6.3.1. FY21 Budget Update and Town Meeting Prep

6.3.1.1. FY21 Budget Book: <https://www.abschools.org/district/finance>

Dave reported that the FY20 General Fund is expected to be a \$500,000 net turnback. Utilities invoices have not been received yet. The biggest outstanding issue is settling the payments to private schools for out of district payments. Regarding the revolving funds, School Lunch is expected to show a loss of \$409,000 which is an improvement due to a waiver to pay for free meals that were distributed. Kristin Nelson also took a retail approach to selling of some of her surplus supplies that was very successful. The Community Education account has not changed since last meeting, showing a net loss of \$471,000. ADK shows a loss of \$300,000 due to switching the budget lines for special education tuition. The PreK/ODP/Athletics account has improved slightly since the last report. Regarding grants, we filed a MEMA grant to cover materials due to the shutdown. For FY21, we expect to apply again for a much larger request from MEMA. We are preparing an application for an ESSR grant of \$114,000. Because both Towns are doing their Town Meetings prior to July1, the 1/12th budget process will not be needed.

6.4. Subcommittee and Member Reports

6.4.1. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light

6.4.1.1. Minutes of meeting on May 27, 2020

Initial approval was received for the septic. A Groundbreaking event for the public was being discussed but it would be tough with the covid restrictions. Adam Klein suggested that people should start thinking about the process of naming the building.

6.4.2. Budget Subcommittee – Diane Baum (6/16)

Everyone is waiting for guidance from the state, including the costs of PPE and how everyone will stay safe from the virus in the fall. John and Tessa will present the budget at the Town Meetings.

6.4.3. Policy Subcommittee – Amy Krishnamurthy

6.4.3.1. Annual Organizational Meeting Procedures Revision, File: BDA-R

Because MGL dictates that the Superintendent oversees the voting for the new Chairperson and then the new Chair runs the election of the two Vice-Chairs, the procedures agreed on at the previous meeting have been revised. The annual organizational meeting is on July 1. The plan is that it will be in person with a zoom option to include the public. Members should tell Tessa and Beth if they are more comfortable participating via zoom.

6.4.4. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Update – John Petersen

The Acton HIT met June 18th. Expenses through eleven months were \$16 million against income of \$15 million for a loss of \$1 million not including expected reinsurance recoveries of \$0.2 million. May showed a favorable variance of \$201K related to reduction in services for members including elective procedures. This favorability is expected to continue in June with the revised expectation that the Trust will lose between \$0.6 million and \$0.8 million in FY20. The Trustees voted to accept the BCBS reinsurance (stop-loss) proposal with a limit of \$125K. The Trustees discussed a draft investment policy with the intent of adopting a policy in the fall. In the annual election, current officers were re-elected, John Petersen will continue as Chair, Steve Barrett as Secretary.

6.5. Recommendation to Accept Donation from the Conant PTO of Lobby Furniture – VOTE – P.Light

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

VOTED by Roll Call with gratitude: to accept the donation from the Conant PTO of lobby furniture.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

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

Tessa McKinley moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by Roll Call: to approve

Payroll warrant(s) as follows –

Number P2025 dated 6/02/20 in the amount of \$\$2,616,114.86;

Payroll deduction warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-025PR dated 6/04/20 in the amount of \$521,533.62;

Vendor warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-025 dated 6/11/20 in the amount of \$429,760.20;

Student Activity Fund warrant(s) as follows –

Number 20-025SH dated 6/11/20 in the amount of \$20,579.23

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

8. **FYI**

Mr. Light noted that several of the FYI items are important because there was not enough time in the past few months due to the closure to do all of the usual presentations. This includes the School Improvement Plan updates. He explained that there will be a new approach to the Plans this year because there is the tremendous amount of work to bringing students back. One School Improvement Plan will be done for all schools with perhaps one goal for each school. There will be one type of goals for Social/Emotional, Academic Recovery, Physical Recovery, Becoming an Anti-racist School. Because there will be so much of the same work being done, it makes sense to combine them into one Plan for consistency. When asked if the school councils will still be engaged in the process, Mr. Light replied that the principals might include them, but the focus this year is on handling the covid issues.

The Superintendent was asked if the effort to recruit more educators of color meant that there will be a quota for certain ethnic groups. Mr. Light stated that there would not be a quota, but we need our educator workforce to look like our students, to the extent that it's possible. We need to prioritize a more diverse workforce, with a long term goal of increasing it by 20%.

A member asked how we will know if students are making progress on the STEAM goals. Mr. Light said that he would return to the Committee with that.

9. **Adjourn**

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

VOTED by Roll Call to adjourn at 9:07 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda