

**ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)**  
**MEETING APPROVED MINUTES**

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

July 23, 2020

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

7:00 p.m.

To call in: 312 626 6799

Live streaming: <http://actontv.org/on-demand/livestream/government>

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Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: none

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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**1. Call to Order (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

Due to the schools being closed as a result of the coronavirus, the meeting was conducted both in person and remotely via a Zoom webinar. Members Kyra Cook, Amy Krishnamurthy, Nora Shine and Yebin Wang participated via zoom and the remaining 7 School Committee members were in the auditorium, per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA. Members and administrators in the auditorium wore masks and sat at least six feet apart.

Public participation was possible via the zoom link or call in phone number. The auditorium was not open to the public. The open meeting was recorded and live streamed. 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. Chairperson's Welcome – Tessa McKinley**

2.1. **Public Participation** – none

**3. ONGOING BUSINESS**

3.1. **Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 7/1/2020 – VOTE** – Tessa McKinley

John Petersen moved, Diane Baum seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve the minutes as written.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

3.2. **School Opening Update** – Peter Light

### 3.2.1. Possible VOTE on 2020-21 Learning Plan

Mr. Light presented the draft guidance on Learning Programs as of July 17, 2020. With new information appearing on a daily basis, administrators must keep an open mind as the thinking is constantly shifting. He thanked the members of the four working groups who have been meeting 3 or 4 times a week in addition to their other regular meetings. This is expected to continue through August, or as long as the pandemic lasts, to help the district adapt.

The goal will always be to transition as many students as possible to in-person learning at the start of the new school year. Four In-Person Learning Modes were considered on a continuum: Full Return, Partial Hybrid, Hybrid, and Fully Remote. A stand alone, Fully Remote Learning Program was also prepared. The Parabola Project, a collaboration between Ariadne Labs and the Learning Accelerator with funding from the One8 Foundation, in partnership with MASS, has been a valuable resource. Attention must be paid to what is happening nationally but local data must also be kept in mind, see Covidactnow.org.

Members discussed the early July survey results that said approximately 80% of families expected to return in the fall while 20% would choose the remote learning program, if they had to choose at this time. No single school had a big enough cohort to offer a full remote program. At this time, a hybrid return to school is recommended based on current information. Originally the decision was going to be for one year, but administrators are rethinking that. Flexibility must be balanced with the need for a good learning experience.

Marie Altieri explained the staffing implications of the two programs. They are trying to match up students who would go remote with staff who want to teach remotely based on the original survey. They are trying not to have to hire a lot of new staff, to make the programs work.

Comments from the Committee included:

- When the budget was presented at the Town Meetings, additional funding was not included for these expenses. This will need to be part of our communications as we go through the year. At this point, estimates are all we have, but the message is trying to be given that costs are being handled in a deliberate, well thought out way.
- The Committee had decided that All Day Kindergarten was appropriate for 5 year olds, but now a half day program is being offered for this age group. There was a discussion of how children this young will be able to stay safely distanced. Smaller groups and spending time outside will help. The Administration will notify families tomorrow if the Committee agrees that the All Day Program will not be offered this year.

- Preschool is a little different and is evolving. We want to be prioritizing our highest needs students.

Dave Verdolino presented financial information. We now have chromebooks for all K-12 students. Those new costs are CARES eligible and the district is working with the two towns for this funding. The impact of the additional custodial work that is required is not known yet. It makes sense to pursue those costs that have no ceiling such as PPE and FEMA, conversely Dave recommends that the ESSR fund be on hold because the eligibility deadline is the furthest out. Some of the other sources have to be completed by December 30.

In response to whether the CARES or Covid relief funding could cover the All Day Kindergarten (ADK) lost tuition, Dave said they are not eligible for revenue reimbursement but many districts are asking about it. The State is being conservative and are not expected to reveal their budget until September.

It was agreed that the Budget Subcommittee would review how to organize and prioritize this information. Some items are definite, like the lost ADK revenue, while some are possibilities. That should be indicated. It was suggested that only when everything else is exhausted, should contingencies be put on the table.

Ginny Kremer appreciated the time and effort being spent by staff and teachers, but emphasized the disruption that families are experiencing as well. She asked what resources are available for single parent households or others that can't work remotely and how families will be able to make it work. In light of that, she asked if the district is trying to prioritize moving toward full in person learning for our youngest students who can't be alone or manage online learning, or special education, or ELL students who can have significant challenges accessing remote education.

The administration started with a "let's bring everyone in" attitude which evolved to "just the secondary schools are hybrid". After looking at the spacing needed and then with the evidence regarding how the virus was evolving, the distance recommended between people became unclear. Students need to be enrolled so the administration can plan staff and schedules. That will be the first challenge. Mr. Light was sympathetic to Ginny's comments. Regarding child care, Erin Bettez and community education are working on ideas, including talking with the local Team Works business facility. Extended day programs cannot be run as they have been in the past, mainly due to distancing.

Most decisions going forward will depend on public health data, and the status of a vaccine. An important goal is to decide on metrics that will help the district decide whether to move forward or close down. This is what The Parabola Project partnership is doing. Mr. Light stressed that we want to be as open as possible. Community expectations must also be balanced. Managing our

community when we do have a case, which is inevitable at some point, will be a measure of our success.

Comments included:

- There is a hunger for what the District's measures will be. Mr. Light said while we will create our own metrics, like for a snow day, but help from larger entities (like Parabola) is needed for a unique situation like this.
- There is no perfect answer, but the strong focus on our core values – Wellness, Equity and Engagement is very much appreciated.
- It looks like students will only have 50% of the instruction they had before. Will they only get 50% of the instructional content this year? Deborah Bookis explained that the process will be to take what are the most critical standards by course and grade. They have a good sense of what happened last year, but also need to use their internal knowledge of what the staff knows about our students. That is being done right now to decide what the critical standards for learning will be this year. The unfinished critical learning from last spring is also being considered for each child. There will be a reduction in total coverage.
- The secret sauce is the community. We are very fortunate to have a highly skilled community that knows how hard this is, and that there is no perfect solution.
- Remote learning did not work for a lot of families especially with the quick pivot, and it is better that it is more thoughtful now than in the spring. Deborah was asked to comment on the curriculum development for the remote classes. For grades 7-12, students would be taught by that section teacher so it is the same curriculum in the different setting. Students learn best in a community, and if they know why they are learning. This has to be translated into remote learning.
- Will the remote curriculum be more robust? Deborah said it will not, just the delivery. The standards will be prioritized because we want both groups to be in generally the same place.
- What is the status of hiring staff? Marie Altieri reported that we have been actively hiring since February and now have back up candidates that we will be considering. We also have paraprofessionals in our work force that may be able to step in if needed. We continually work to attract candidates of color and have been working with colleges and universities regarding recent grads. This is a big reason why the administration needs the final decisions about which students will be remote vs in-person.
- Is there a tipping point when the learning plans will change? It's 80% in person/hybrid - 20% all remote now, but that is based on only the initial survey. The registration window will open next week and that will help to guide the Administration in starting the real planning.

- On Wednesdays, for grades 7-12, each class will have 20 minutes for a remote check in conversation. This will be a little different but the point of Wednesdays is to maintain relationships between the kids and their teachers.
- Professional Development has included summer work around creative conversations, another one about holidays, and the curricular aspect is ongoing. The Antidefamation League and NAEYC resources have also been used PK-12. Regarding anti-racism work, a focus has been on “what we should expect to see in a classroom..”.
- Has student peer coaching been considered? Deborah will be reaching out to alum in college to see if they might want to support. Some college seniors who might want to zoom in to work with kids may be considered. We are thinking of all different ways to use students to support our students.
- There will be some choices offered in the remote learning. Students’ choices are driven by the electives offered. The High School is looking at trying to offer limited electives but there has to be enough students to offer them. To know that, we need to know who will be in which program. Some cutting back in areas is required to make time for the most critical essential learning. We can collapse and consolidate things if needed.
- How will we be ready for a second wave of the virus? An advantage of the hybrid model is that staff is always thinking of what to do with students in-person and remotely. A classroom may need to pivot into remote environment in one day if someone gets sick. Educators have to be working at all times to go completely remote.

From the audience:

- Has any consideration been given to using a virtual high school program to deliver content remotely? We use Ingenuity a lot in the district, and Mr. Light has used many others. Our curriculum is not close to any of these programs however. Some students are successful and some aren’t. Traditional online schools do not have the rigor that AB can offer with our own staff. We have explored partnering with other districts to give students some choice, but that has not come to fruition yet.
- Is it possible for AB to have some remote and have those that want in person go 5 days a week? Mr. Light responded that it is a possibility, but the metrics are not available yet to make that decision. If there is a safe way to do it, we want to bring kids back.
- If the state guidance says 3 feet of distance between people is enough, why is AB not going with that? The CDC recommends 6 feet while DESE says 3 feet. Until medical guidance agrees, we need to be cautious.
- Why are elementary schools not able to each have their own remote cohort, like the Jr High and High School? Because we do not have

enough students in any one of the elementary schools to support their own cohort, this is not possible. We cannot do something for one school that we cannot do for all of them. Equity is one of our core values meaning we are allocating resources fairly and this is part of that. There will be some chances for interactions with their schools.

Mr. Light told the School Committee that they do not need to vote on this issue tonight. DESE guidance is to wait until August, although districts are supposed to submit their plans by August 4. He would, however, like general consent that the Administration is heading in the right direction with these strategic choices.

Members voiced support for voting right away to show the community that they support the Administration's plans. This would be with the understanding that the situation is evolving. Ginny Kremer expressed frustration with the lateness of guidance from the state and was not ready to vote yet. It was suggested that it could be added to the meeting coming up on July 30, although some members felt it would be distracting to do as part of their workshop, and they were ready. Members shared concern over the state guidance, and stressed that the plan could be adjusted as the situation changes. Kyra Cook stressed that the community voice is a key element that was missing given that families had not registered for their programs yet, although she was ready to vote to support with a contingency that adjustments may be made.

John Petersen moved that the ABRSC support the hybrid school reopening plan based on the assumption that approximately 80% of the community will support hybrid and 20% will support a remote learning program.

Diane Baum seconded the motion.

Members discussed what would happen if a significant number of families changed their minds and if that would change the direction that the Superintendent would take. Mr. Light said that it would not because this model can expand and contract. He does not want to be constrained if the Committee votes and then an opportunity comes up. This model, however, can adjust if things change. An in-person model is on a continuum. A member described it as, "We're voting to let the district continue their work to move forward, not voting on a nitty gritty detailed plan." Adam suggested including wording that included "to approve the spirit and direction of our learning plans....."

John Petersen withdrew his motion. Diane Baum withdrew her second of the motion.

Adam Klein moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was,

**VOTED by roll call: that the ABRSC vote to approve the spirit and direction of the 2020-2021 learning plan including both a fully remote and continuum in-person model, with the understanding that final details of the plan are yet to be determined.**

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang NO: Kremer)

3.2.2. 2020-21 School Calendar Change- **VOTE** - *Marie Altieri*

The Administration requested to move the start of school date from August 31 to September 8<sup>th</sup>. The state primary election is scheduled for September 1 with polling in some of our schools. Also, DESE and MTA are recommending more planning time for staff and are expected to make a decision (DESE) about reducing the required number of school days. We would intend to use remote learning on snow days to prevent school extending too far into June, if that becomes an issue.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, John Petersen seconded, and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call**: to revise the 2020-2021 school calendar for the ABRSD to schedule the first day of school for students on Tuesday, September 8, 2020.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

3.2.3. Budget Update (*oral*) - *Dave Verdolino (see above)*

3.3. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

3.3.1. New Subcommittee and Liaison Assignments - *Tessa McKinley*

Tessa reviewed the memo and asked members to let her know their interests by August 6. Diane noted that the liaison positions are important because it is critical to know what is going on with the other boards and for them to see school committee presence there. Liaisons build good relationships.

An addition is a DEI liaison that Kyra Cook has experience with, as well as a mentoring resource for new members. The Debt Strategy Subcommittee is no longer needed. Some of these may be done remotely next year.

3.3.2. School Building Committee

3.3.2.1. Membership Update – **VOTE** - *Peter Light*

With the change of members of the Acton Board of Selectmen and School Committee, a vote was needed to revise the Building Committee members.

Adam Klein moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call**: to accept the School Building Committee list as found in the packet.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

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

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

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve the Gross Payroll warrant(s) as follows –  
FY2020 warrants Number P2027 and 2028 dated 6/30/20, and  
FY2021 warrants Number P2101 dated 7/02/20, and P2102 dated 7/16/20  
In the total amount of \$1,536,119.12

and the Accounts Payable warrant(s) as follows –  
FY2020 payroll deduction warrants Number 20-027PR and 028-PR, and  
FY2020 vendor warrants Number 20-027 and 027F, all dated 6/30/20;  
FY2021 payroll deduction warrants Number 21-001PR dated 7/02/20 and 21-  
002PR dated 7/16/20, and  
FY2021 vendor warrants Number 21-001A dated 7/01/20 and 21-001 dated  
7/09/20 In the total amount of \$6,670,962.77  
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy,  
McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

John Petersen gave an update on the Acton Health Insurance Trust (HIT)'s Year end cash flow for FY20. Through twelve months, the HIT had expenses of \$17.2 million against income of \$16.3 million resulting in a loss of \$0.9 million. The loss is in alignment with the planned reduction of the unrestricted assets of the Trust. As in April and May, June showed a favorable variance of \$144K related to reduction in services for members including elective procedures. I have no insight as to whether or not this favorability will continue in FY21 as behavior is impacted by the ongoing pandemic. The next meeting is September 17.

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

**VOTED by roll call:** to adjourn the ABRSC at 10:15 p.m.

(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

**NEXT MEETINGS:**

July 30<sup>th</sup> - ABRSC Business Meeting at 7:00 p.m. following SEED training at 4:30 p.m.

Regular ABRSC Meetings at 7:00 p.m. are scheduled for: August 13 and 27, and September 3