

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
APPROVED MINUTES

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

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

To call in: 312 626 6799

Live streaming:

Wednesday, August 5, 2020

6:30 p.m. Executive Session

7:00 p.m. Open Business Meeting

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum (7:03 p.m.), Kyra Cook (left at 6:39 p.m., returned at 7:06 p.m.), Adam Klein (6:50 p.m.), Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang (6:38 p.m.)

Members Absent: none

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley (7:07 p.m.), Deborah Bookis (7:07 p.m.), Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order by Chairperson Tessa McKinley at 6:37 p.m. She noted that the meeting was being conducted both in person and remotely via a Zoom webinar and that members Kyra Cook and Yebin Wang were participating via zoom, as would Adam Klein when he arrived. The remaining 8 School Committee members were in the auditorium. Per our Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The meeting was being taped by Acton TV.

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Tessa stated the need for an executive session pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee.

John Petersen made the motion, seconded by Ginny Kremer, and it unanimously

VOTED by roll call: to enter executive session for the reason stated.

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

Tessa said that the Committee would return at approximately 7:00 to the open meeting.

3. **Chairperson's Welcome**

The Committee returned to the open meeting at 7:07 p.m. Tessa McKinley thanked everyone who was in attendance, noting that there were over 120 people on the zoom. She encouraged all to "be kind".

3.1. **Public Participation** – none

4. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

4.1. **Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of ~~7/23/2020~~ (next meeting) and 7/30/20 – VOTE – Tessa McKinley**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the minutes of July 30, 2020 as written.

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

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

4.2.1. **VOTE** on 2020-2021 Learning Plan

4.2.1.1. [Transition to School](#) website found on www.abschools.org

Mr. Light gave a brief overview of the final Transition to School plan found on our website. It was emailed to all members and families over the weekend. The focus now was to be sure members have the most recent information, as things continue to change, and to have a final vote on the Plan prior to DESE submission.

He began by saying that if we did not open schools now, it is hard to imagine our communities' numbers getting better as they are close to zero. The state numbers are increasing and that data will be watched. National data is concerning but not as relevant. We may need to adjust starting plans based on what we see in public health data. We do ask for a vote tonight, keeping all of this in mind. The Recommended Plan consists of two programs, one in person and one remote. Effective 8/4/20 (the previous night), 74% of students requested in person learning and 26% remote.

The Administration is also asking for another calendar change vote based on what the DESE is expected to decide. This would have school start on September 14th (instead of the 8th) and give staff 11 days before the start of school year for professional learning, plus one in October and one in November on Election Day.

With 170 zoom attendees, comments and questions from the Committee included:

- Are we out of our class size guidelines with the remote students? It is possible that we are but it is a different environment and teachers can meet with half and small groups.
- Given the levels of elementary enrollment, could Gates be closed? We are 2 or 3 classrooms shy of being able to do that classrooms-wise. Moving modulars to Conant was considered, but it could not be done in a year so students would have to go back to Gates after a year, and it would be too disruptive for students.
- What about preschool class sizes? Preschool will be fully in person. DESE has advised that high needs students and preschoolers should return in person full time. Parents were surveyed to see if they want to come fully in person or remote and it seems like they are divided on that. We will provide remote instruction for those that want it and in person for those who prefer that method.
- How closely are we following the evolving CDC guidelines regarding eye protection? We have purchased full face shields for all staff so that we can pivot quickly if needed. We are committed to being able to adjust the best that we can, when things change.
- Is there a process to keep track of covid cases in our towns? How do we get the data and make decisions? If there is a case in town that wouldn't affect students, then we wouldn't change anything operationally because it wouldn't affect our schools. The Administration is meeting next week with the Acton and Boxborough Boards of Health and the Town Manager and Town Administrator because we all have to use common health measurements and metrics. We comply with HIPPA. Our goal is to share all data with our local Boards of Health and we have a system in place for our nurses and HR folks to monitor student, family and staff cases. We encourage families to see the protocols on our website about all of this regarding if virus is found in a school. DESE is expected to provide guidance soon about this. The state issued their weekly report today and Acton has had 4 cases and Boxborough has had 2 in the past 4 weeks.
- Many people are concerned about windows, air filters, HVAC, teachers sharing devices, etc. How are you addressing this? There are two main standards used to measure this type of thing used by the CDC and ASHREG. All of our systems meet or exceed those standards.

- How will students be trained to stay safe in school? “Three for you & me” is a poster that will be very visible and frequently mentioned by staff to students. The three practices are: Wear a mask, Wash your hands, and Use distancing (at least two arm lengths between people). One factor is also time. A short exposure is not nearly as bad as prolonged exposure. Part of the work with the educators in the first days will be for educators to be clear with families and students what will be expected. As we transition back with students, a lot of time will be spent on safety protocols - understanding and practicing them.
- If we go fully remote, will we be able to provide the in person services that a number of students who are high needs require? Yes. If there is a school closure that is due to health and safety, then we cannot provide those services but if it’s for another reason, we will.
- How does the district expect to help kids who were isolated or didn’t benefit educationally doing remote last spring when they return now? We see the academic and social emotional needs as together. Our focus when we return is to help shrink the change. The first 4 weeks of the year will be about establishing relationships, including caring collaborative communities of learners, so kids can bring their entire self to school. We’re bringing in specialists to do some training for teachers. We want to set the stage that SEL (Social Emotional Learning) is about teachers and students. Resilient practices through a trauma lens will also be part of this, as many have experienced grief. There’s a lot of emotion around all of this and we want staff to think about what this means in the classroom as they are setting up routines and structures. We will first identify grade level content regarding the critical standards they need to learn this year and the prerequisite skills and then assess the students to see where their needs are. All staff will be shown how to use the screening tools.
- What is the update regarding Kindergarten? Kindergarten parents have been notified, and there will be no All Day K. It will be 4 days/week for either morning or afternoon, with the rooms cleaned in between the two groups.
- How are you trying to improve the learning experience for students? We are creating a digital tool box for teachers to use in a remote setting. Finetuning is ongoing so we plan to structure the Wednesday teacher together time to constantly ask what are we seeing? What can we adjust?
- What are we doing for kids who may not have all of the resources? Last spring, we did an initiative to be sure all students had a chromebook or device available as well as internet. If needed, the district gave them a hotspot and paid the monthly fee. There has been a lot of individual outreach and we will continue to be sure everyone has appropriate access. At the elementary schools, we are putting together “go bags” for all students with supplies.
- What are some things that we’re working toward for students on IEPs? The learning in the fall will be much more robust than the spring, per the DESE. They are obligated to provide all services required by the IEP. We are looking for more guidance and clarity from DESE but are prepared to do this remotely and in person. We are just now getting the data about which learning program the kids have chosen and are starting to put it all together. This will be done child by child. A member noted that the intention of our district and Long Range Strategic Plan and strategic goals is for equity of outcomes.
- How will parents be involved in these IEP decisions and able to advocate for needs? It all has to involve parent agreement and support. We are starting with our highest need students, per DESE. A child that received 5 x 45 minutes per week may have that time bundled in one day or changed but that is a discussion with each family.
- Has there been any consideration given to asking families if they would prefer to have children on opposite days so they could have individual attention? This has not been considered, but may be a good idea. The administration is looking for creative ideas for best solutions.

- What about meals for our economically disadvantaged hybrid students? We continue to provide food 3 days a week. We will be moving to once a week for a bag of groceries of 5 breakfasts and lunches per week.
- If there is a final, will it be a paper exam? Exams and tests are one form of assessment. There are a lot of options online. It might be more effective to do the assessment remotely and not use the time assessing. There are lots of tools that will be included in the toolbox being put together. The grading system will stay the same regardless of in person or remotely.
- Noting that there are still many unanswered questions, a member cautioned the administration not to overpromise to the public. Things will evolve over time. She added that we have to trust the district leadership to move things forward.

Members of the public asked about virus testing. While a few possibilities for testing have explored, they are not economically feasible. UMASS was considered but did not pan out. The Broad Institute has not opened up to K-12 schools yet. We are working with MASS (Mass Association of School Superintendents) regarding some state wide testing, including exploring sewage testing.

There was a discussion of the importance of students staying home if they are sick, and how that requirement would be communicated to them, especially to High Schoolers. Mr. Light said that any attendance policy must start with how we will support students when they are home. If students come in with any symptoms they will be required to go to a room until they are picked up to go home. They will then be in quarantine for 2 weeks or after testing. Families fill out forms regarding asthma, allergies and chronic respiratory conditions that can mimic covid symptoms that will be on file. As always, our nurses will be charged with when to call a parent to come and take their child home. This could be tricky heading into flu season. The District has two physicians on staff. State Nursing and DPH will also send guidance.

A question was asked about what infrastructure is being put in place if we have to go totally remote again. Mr. Light stated that we are preparing for that pivot. Professional learning will take place at the beginning of year. Decisions being made now are much more deliberate than in the spring. Research has been done and tools are being shared to make sure that everyone understands what the experience will look like. Expectations must be known regarding attendance, standards, etc and this will provide a different experience than in the spring. A member of the public asked if there was a plan that the Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) was planning for. Mr. Light invited anyone from the association to speak if they wished to. No one responded during the meeting.

John Petersen moved:

that Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee approve the Transition to School Plan as published, including the recommendation to begin the year in a hybrid model of in-person learning with a fully remote option for families, with the understanding that this plan may be altered by the administration based on changes to public health information.

Ginny Kremer seconded the motion.

Members commented:

- A key difference between remote learning last spring and the fall is that our teachers knew their students when they left in March. This fall they won't know them when school begins.

- The district has done an amazing job of considering all of the variables. There is no perfect answer, just a best answer. Thank you to all who have working on this.
- There is still a lot of fear, and we need to spend more time focusing on the significant disadvantages of remote learning for some kids, especially younger ones. One member felt very strongly that the district start off in person, and check the virus data daily.
- A member stated that she would support the motion, but wants families to know that infrastructure is being put in place because things probably won't stay this way and plans need to be made to pivot if necessary. Another member agreed.
- The hybrid option is appreciated, especially since it is based on the survey data. The flexibility of being able to change models is essential.
- Another member struggled with the decision. Despite that many people want this choice of models, she thinks they are not making a good choice. She noted that members are elected to serve the students and teachers are essential workers. She appreciated knowing that the district has best practices to mitigate risk and guide decisions. After the spring's remote model left many feeling disengaged and disconnected, students now crave in person learning. She acknowledged that it's complicated and student driven, and the working groups and district leadership team have done a heroic job.
- Tessa McKinley stated that she has full assurance from the administration and knows that student and educator safety have been at the forefront combined with student learning. She also emphasized that much change may still occur.

The Committee **VOTED by roll call** and unanimously approved the motion.

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

Mr. Light thanked the School Committee for all of their support throughout the process. He also thanked the Leadership Team for their efforts and resilience working through the many challenges. He also acknowledged the educators and anyone involved in bringing the students back to school because it is asking a lot of them. The District will focus on first and foremost after the physical safety, the emotional safety of our educators, students and families.

4.2.2. **VOTE** on revision to the 2020-2021 School Calendar – *Marie Altieri*

The DESE has reduced the number of school days required from 180 to 170 days so more professional development could be provided to staff. As a result, it was proposed that the first day for students be September 14th with 11 professional days for teachers, plus two other contractual professional days to be held on October 9 and November 3. Marie explained that the weeks that have Monday holidays will have in person learning on those Wednesdays.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the revised 2020-2021 school calendar.

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

4.2.3. Budget Update (*next meeting*)

4.3. Subcommittee and Member Reports

4.3.1. New Subcommittee and Liaison Assignments for 2020-2021 – *Tessa McKinley*

Assignments were not included yet because Tessa wanted a wider discussion about the subcommittees so members are more prepared. To avoid a quorum a member cannot be on both the budget and policy subcommittees although several people wanted to do that. Liaisons to the Acton and Boxborough

boards are interesting and important assignments so we know what is going on in the community. Joint PTSO and SEPAC liaison are other important ones. The Towns' Boards of Health could be new opportunities this year. Members were asked to take another look at the list and ask if they have questions. Tessa described assignments as a great opportunity to learn about something new to round out members' knowledge and to grow our leadership abilities. Members should contact Tessa regarding their assignment for the new year.

4.3.2. School Building Committee Update –Peter Light (*oral*)

Construction is moving along. The Board of Health has approved the project and gave the permit for the septic system. Modulars are being installed next week so things should be ready for school.

5. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – Tessa McKinley (*next meeting*)**

6. **FYI**

7. **Adjourn**

John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:34 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:

- August 27 – 7:00 p.m.
- September 3 – 7:00 p.m.