

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Approved Minutes

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

September 19, 2019
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: Ginny Kremer, Paul Murphy
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Tessa McKinley, ABRSC Chairperson.

2. **OPEN MEETING - Welcome! Routine Business**

2.1. **Chairperson's Opening Remarks**

The Superintendent read a statement regarding this afternoon's fatal traffic accident involving a motorcycle and a school bus carrying one of our Junior High athletic team. Our hearts go out to the family of the motorcyclist and the Westford community.

2.2. **Public Participation - none**

2.3. **High School Student Representatives Update -**

Caroline Browning reported that we have now officially cycled through 14 days at the High School and people really like this new change. The Student Council is sponsoring a powderpuff game. Tickets are selling and there is a lot of enthusiasm. Justin Shan said last week's Activity Fair was very successful with many kids signing up for all kinds of clubs. Michael Cheng described the parent night regarding college applications. Counselors met with seniors about the process. Many students are interested in the climate protest tomorrow morning. He asked the School Committee to consider looking into a "protest policy" as AB does not have a specific one. It could concern safety and/or preserving the rights of those students who do not want to participate. He referred to MGL Chapter 71 section 82.

A member appreciated that the representatives are including some specific suggestions in their updates. They were asked if they thought a good job was being done to keep the clubs of a high quality or were there so many that they were being diluted. They responded that there is a nice balance. Students are aware that if they cannot find something good, they can create a new club or activity. If a club is not strong, it dies out.

2.4. **Superintendent's Update**

The Superintendent and School Committee Chair are hosting Community Coffees on October 11 and November 15 in the administration building auditorium. All are welcome. Mr. Light and Dr. Bentley are looking for volunteers for a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Family & Community Advisory Group. The first meeting is October 24. A team of leaders will be attending an important DESE conference next month regarding "Access and Equity".

Lastly, this is expected to be the School Committee's last meeting in the Junior High Library. The renovated Administration Building Auditorium will be a nice improvement for School Committee members and the public. The Superintendent thanked Acton TV for their assistance in making this possible.

3. GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS

3.1. District Strategy Update – *Peter Light*

The Superintendent presented a very early preview of the strategy. He described “overarching strategic objectives” as different from goals. Strategies have to be flexible so adjustments can be made when things don't work out as planned. Strategic initiatives are the actual things you want to do to achieve the objective. This process began in July 2018 with Mr. Light's Phase 1 Entry Process and Findings, and yielded a fascinating diagram of intersecting circles based on the four areas for focus: Engaged Learning, Inclusive Practices, Social and Emotional Well-being, and Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes. When considered in conjunction with the Values Compass (Students should be loved, valued, challenged and supported.) the result is the initial framework for where Mr. Light wants to take our District over the next five years.

Students need to be agents of their own instruction and this will increase in the coming years by increasing students' voices and choices. Mr. Light stated that “our work is only as good as what happens every day in our classrooms for every student”. The School Committee will be asked to adopt this integrated approach at one of their November meetings.

The Committee was very appreciative of the Superintendent's approach and had many positive comments and some questions. Some of these were:

- “How could one not rally behind this? It is so thorough and student centered.”
- Racial balance at elementary schools was a concern for one member. The Superintendent agreed that this was “a symptom” and he plans to take a further look into this area.
- Teachers will have a lot to do with all of this and smaller class sizes should be considered. Also specialists who see 520 kids cannot deliver all of these values in a meaningful way, like a librarian or PE teacher.
- This seems great for the elementary schools but may be harder to do in the secondary schools. Learning at the Jr High and High School level is different with older kids.
- The detail work will be challenging but he is looking forward to seeing a multi-year plan across all grades.
- We have to establish how each school will do this successfully in their own way.
- This is all very exciting, especially the increasing engagement piece.
- The school can only go so far to help kids have a good day. Regarding social-emotional wellbeing, school is only one piece that we can control and we have to be honest about that. The community holds a large piece as well.
- Calling it “an excellent plan” a member expressed concern about how inclusive it is because it is a lot to take on all at once. She loved how the Superintendent balanced so many things, including how to gather data without turning children into data points.

Referring to the intersecting circles diagram, Mr. Light talked about how we are always trying to prioritize things because there are so many things to work on. The circles clearly show that the closer things are to the center, the more we should be working on them because they are important. Mr. Light advocated for being loose enough to encourage creativity but tight enough to maintain cohesion. He also noted the work of John Hattie who concluded that the number one influence on a child's education is the quality of the teacher.

A member pointed out that the school councils need to be educated on the proposed diagram because they are driving the School Improvement Plans. Mr. Light agreed, adding that next year's Improvement Plans will have a strong correlation between these points. He explained that there is great deep learning going on in our classrooms right now. We want to find that, celebrate it and encourage students and staff to do whatever it is that increases student engagement.

3.2. **All Day Kindergarten Preliminary Presentation and Discussion** – *Marie Altieri*

Ms. Altieri shared K-12 enrollment data noting that overall-12 enrollment is down 150 students. Of our current 306 kindergarteners, 240 attend All Day (78%) and 66 Half Day (22%). 4% of Acton students attend school in Boxborough while 16% of Boxborough students attend school in Acton. It was stressed that even though 78% of the students are in All Day, all classes are a half day curriculum. Marie reviewed the results of a survey done last Spring of incoming Kindergarten, Kindergarten and First Grade families. Moving to All Day Kindergarten (ADK) is estimated to cost \$1.2 million. Several funding models were discussed. Although there are a number of reasons to consider universal ADK, the primary one is equity.

Comments from the Committee discussion included:

- Are there cost savings because we would not have to do the mid day bussing? There might be but it had not been looked at yet.
- More information was requested on how outcomes might differ if a full day curriculum was developed, and how this might affect children on an IEP or those who need other services. The earlier children receive interventions, the better the payoff has been shown.
- The budget information is important but you must balance the benefits with costs.
- It will be considered what preferences would be if cost were not part of the survey question. Can we ask if parents would prefer half-day or all day if ADK were free.
- Historical ADK enrollment change will be provided at a future meeting.
- Marie will try to provide data from other districts before and after they offered ADK and how it changed over the years.
- Because the state does not require ADK, we are looking at soft values and what they are worth. This includes weighing the time spent with family and playing versus curriculum.
- One member felt the decision about using E&D is about the budget as a whole, not a specific item like this.

Additional information will be provided at a future meeting and the Committee will be asked to decide whether or not to proceed with universal ADK in November.

4. **NEW BUSINESS**

4.1. Recommendation to Approve Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ABRSD and Acton Community Access Television, Inc. – VOTE – Peter Light

Mr. Light stated that the MOU had been reviewed by our attorney.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between ABRSD and Acton Community Access Television, Inc. as proposed and authorize the ABRSC Chairperson to sign the document.

5. ONGOING BUSINESS

5.1. Approval of Minutes of Meetings on 9/5/19 and 9/9/19 – VOTE – Tessa McKinley

Adam Klein moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the minutes of the meetings on 9/5/19 and 9/9/19 (open only).

5.2. FY19 Year End Financial Report – Dave Verdolino

5.2.1. Slides

Dave Verdolino reported and due to the clarity of his memo and presentation, there were no questions.

5.3. Capital Plan Bond Update – Dave Verdolino

5.3.1. Slides

Dave Verdolino presented on possible bonding options for some of the District's capital items (unrelated to the building project). Given the current favorable financial environment with municipal bond interest rates at historic lows, this could result in significant savings. The District's Financial Advisor agrees and has offered recommendations suggesting possible savings of \$525,000.

Specifically, incorporating our Capital Improvement Plan and Building Project bond issuances could be beneficial if we did this in FY20. Repayment would have to start one year sooner, so Dave re ran the numbers. One implication is that originally in the early years of the plan, there was more cash available. If we bond sooner, we would have to pay more sooner. We could shift some of the projects later, or use some money from the capital stabilization fund for the payment. Using stabilization funds would just be a cash flow issue. This discussion will be continued.

5.4. School Building Committee Update – Adam Klein

5.4.1. Current Flyer listing Public Forums

Community forums are scheduled for November 4 and 14 in Acton as well as December 2 in Boxborough.

5.5. Subcommittee Business

5.5.1. Debt Strategy – John Petersen/Dave Verdolino

5.5.1.1. Memo and slides

Due to current low interest rates, the Debt Strategy subcommittee recommends basing decisions on a 3% interest rate with level payments. Because rates are so low, they recommend 25-30 years. At 3% for a typical Acton \$590,000 home for 30 year debt the cost would be \$442/year, for 25 years it would be \$498 per year. For a typical Boxborough \$610,000 home, it would cost \$307 for 30 or \$346 for 25 years. Those are the numbers recommended for the public discussions. It was noted that bond issuing is controlled by the District Treasurer, Margaret Dennehy.

In response to a question, Dave will provide how much the District would save for the 30 year vs the 25 year bonds for each town. It was also suggested that the tax impact for our two towns be considered for the school building project debt. When considering how much lower rates are compared to when the project began, this change in savings is very significant.

5.5.2. Budget – Diane Baum

The Subcommittee met and will bring a revised charge for the School Committee to consider. There is a budget update for FY20 due to a number of students who have moved in to Merriam and McCarthy-Towne requiring special services. Peter reported that they have been evaluating staffing levels in those programs and will need to add special education staff. We will still end up to the good in the staffing budget area. Circuit breaker funds could be used if needed.

5.5.3. Minuteman Tech – Angie Tso – next meeting

5.6. School Committee Liaison Reports

5.6.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – Possible Tri-Board Meeting, Tues, Nov 12
Amy reported that they met this morning and discussed most of what was talked about tonight. The North Acton fire station is expected to be on the Special Town Meeting warrant in December. The preliminary draft of the warrant was reviewed.

5.6.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) –
Tessa reported that they met on Sept 10 and the group was updated on the building project and the planned Special Town Meeting.

5.7. Statement of Warrants

Tessa read the warrants and members signed the documents.

6. FYI

- 6.1. Coffees with the Superintendent and School Committee Chair – Friday, Oct 11 and Nov 15 at 8:00 a.m. in the Administration Building auditorium
- 6.2. Acton Nursing Services Flu Clinic
- 6.3. FY20 ABRSC Subcommittees and Assignments
- 6.4. Change to Members of the Board of Advisors of the OPEB Trust Fund
- 6.5. Acton & Boxborough Special Town Meetings on December 10, 2019

Amy Krishnamurthy reported that Representative Tami Goveia asked her to tell the School Committee that the Ed Reform bill is out and she will send a link. Members' thoughts are welcome.

The ABRSC was adjourned at 9:28 p.m., moved by John Petersen and seconded by Amy Krishnamurthy.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see Agenda with list