

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
APPROVED MINUTES

Auditorium
Administration Building
15 Charter Road, Acton

December 19, 2019
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo (7:20 p.m.), Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer , Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. Chairperson Tessa McKinley called the ABRSC to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. **OPEN MEETING - Welcome!**

2.1. **Chairperson's Opening Remarks**

2.2. **Public Participation - none**

2.3. **High School Student Representatives Update - none**

2.4. **Superintendent's Update –**

Mr. Light thanked everyone who helped with the approval of the Building Project at the Special Town Meetings and elections. He noted the “extraordinary sense of an intergenerational commitment from people to educate our youth with the highest quality programs and educational facilities”.

3. **PRESENTATIONS (7:15)**

3.1. **MCAS 2019 Report – Deborah Bookis, Dawn Bentley**

Deborah Bookis described types of assessments and purposes such as diagnostic/instructional and system monitoring/accountability (NAEP and MCAS). She reminded members of the District Guidelines that say that standardized tests will only be used in concert with a diverse set of measures to capture how well our students are doing at a given time. Dawn Bentley shared the lowest quartile data for grades 4-8, and MCAS results disaggregated by subgroup. Moving forward, the district will focus on DCAP and UDL, inclusive practices, co-teaching, SEED training, neuro-cognitive implications for learning, and educator evaluations.

Regarding accountability by school (slide 6), Douglas declined significantly since last time. Deborah reported that the principal has a plan and they are working with him to address this. There is excitement about the work that is happening in the elementary schools with the Grade 6 Illustrative Mathematics pilot.

In response to a question about how accountability is connected to staff evaluations, Deborah explained how educators' goals are sometimes tied to their schools' improvement plans. A suggestion was made to add information at the bottom of some of the slides to explain the percentiles. She discussed the common assessments but it is challenging to do for math because the schools have been able to choose their own programs. Math units are done at different times in the schools. Her goal for the next year or two is to obtain common assessments. It was noted that it is possible to have common assessments and still allow for differences in the classrooms.

Regarding the pie chart of the lowest quartile data (slide 23), a member expressed concern that half of the lowest quartile students are on IEPs. Deborah responded that this is one of the reasons they are working with the Building Department Leaders, and other staff members. Mr. Light added that the focus is to try to keep kids in class during instruction and not pull them out for services while content is being taught. This is also reflected in the planning of next year's proposed budget. Increase professional learning funding is another step being taken, especially for math. Another member was surprised about the ELA Grades 3-8/Disaggregated by Disability and English Learner Status data (Slide 30). He described this information as the other data set (of disabled and non-disabled students) that complements slide 23. Given these results, he asked that next year's presentation of this data be done in a similar way so they are comparable in future years for progress. A member was interested to see the meets and exceeds categories separated out (similar to slide 15). Mr. Light reminded that Committee that the focus on coaching really started this year so there is nothing to compare it to yet. He reiterated that the Douglas administration has some clear goals to raise student achievement.

Bill Guthlein, who has done his own version of MCAS analysis locally for the AB Special Education Parent Advisory Council for many years, spoke as a member of the public regarding some trends that he has noticed since 2017. He will share his report when it is ready. There are many variables to consider, including the changed composition of the test, online test taking, etc. Deborah responded that it is difficult to separate out if there is a correlation, but it would be hard to say these things had no effect.

3.2. FY21 Budget Update – Peter Light

In response to a request to try to reduce the proposed FY21 school budget and assessments, Mr. Light reviewed his memo that lowered the budget by \$522,000 and the increase to 3.18%. The majority of this came from reduced personnel costs due to retirements and salary adjustments. This assumes a reduction in All Day Kindergarten tuition of \$750 per student, which is offset by using \$180,000 in E&D.

This is the first year the District has used the Assabet Valley Collaborative for wrap around services, so the number of families using it has been low and level funding it for next year seems appropriate.

The reduction in Acton's assessment from 3.9% to 3.26% was considered significant given that Acton is near the tax limit. Members appreciated that the lower number is more sustainable. Mention was made of the need to conserve E&D. The superintendent was commended for finding reductions without significant loss of services.

3.3. FY21 All Day Kindergarten Tuition – VOTE – Marie Altieri

3.3.1. Foundation Budget and Hypothetical Projections for the Student Opportunity Act – Dave Verdolino presented possible future funding scenarios from the SOA. Deborah Bookis discussed an overview of All Day Kindergarten schedule. Marie Altieri shared a review of the district's ADK program and funding models with a recommendation to reduce tuition from \$4,500 to \$3,750 for FY21 while using \$180,000 from E&D to fund it. Members were reminded that the discussion of possibly moving to tuition-free ADK began at their meeting last January.

The Committee had an extensive discussion of the recommendations and options. Dave confirmed that if we went to universal ADK next year, we would get credit for our full number of students that we do not get credit for now due to our half day program. Full time students get double the half day K students' funding in foundation aid.

In response to a question, Deborah said that it would be difficult to have full day curriculum completely in place for September, given the amount of work needed with our coordinators and educators. It could be ready for Fall 2021. A full day schedule could be in place in September, but not necessarily the full day curriculum. Members agreed that this was an important new piece of information.

The Committee discussed if there was evidence of academic success of full day kindergartners compared to those who attended half day programs. Although there are many variables, Deborah said that our internal data does not show a significant difference. Mr. Light added that because we don't have a full day curriculum, but really a half day with an extension, we would not expect to see an advantage in our own students.

Several members commented on the teachers' responses in the survey. One member felt there was an overwhelming sentiment that it is fine to have an opt out of ADK. AB is one of the few districts that does not do ADK.

Marie Altieri agreed with a comment from the public that revenue should be \$210,000 not \$240,000, confirming that these numbers can shift a bit and there are variables. The result is that the district could fund it in about a year sooner (four years instead of five). Members asked about specific numbers and funding assumptions. A member stated that funding sources are very important to understand given that Acton is at their levy limit and took a 5% tax increase for bonding of the building project. If we're going to drop ADK tuition by \$750 every year, the message is that we are on the road to full ADK. Equity is another important piece.

Last year, it was startling that in the half day K class, 25% of students received Free/Reduced Lunch. After much thought, different ideas were implemented and children were offered placement in the full day program resulting in this year there are only 4 or 5 children on free and reduced lunch in the half day K. The hybrid program makes it much easier to move kids to the longer day. Many of the equity issues have improved.

Marie confirmed that enrollment is expected to grow. She considers growth of classrooms separate from the ADK discussion. When asked if we can guarantee that any student that wants ADK and cannot afford it, will be accommodated, Marie explained that a sliding scale is used to determine assistance, but there are many families in the middle who struggle to pay for ADK.

John Petersen moved to set tuition for All Day Kindergarten for FY21 at \$4,500. Angie Tso seconded the motion and there was discussion.

The Committee had an extensive discussion about the lack of detail in the motion and how the program would be funded. Several members felt it was important for the Committee to show their commitment to ADK at this time. Beginning to reduce the tuition and understand when the curriculum will be ready are essential. John stated that he did not feel that the two towns should pay for ADK themselves. When the state would provide funding, he would be in favor. A member reminded the Committee that the state gave grants out for years in recognition of the benefit of ADK to children. Another member said that she could not in good conscience thank the towns for the building project and then say they were making ADK free. Moving toward reducing it to \$3750 is a positive step in the right direction.

Several members struggled with what to do given the unclear research and perhaps how their decision could affect future financing and bonding. One member wanted to see the schedule and curriculum. Several had experiences in ADK and half day programs.

A comment was made that members needed to do this in a financially responsible manner keeping in mind the importance to show their commitment to equity and a move to Universal ADK.

The Committee **VOTED** on the motion and it failed.

(YES: Bo, Petersen, Tso – weighted vote of 6 NO: Baum, Klein, Kremer ,
Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Shine – weighted vote of 15.5)

Adam Klein moved to set tuition at \$3,750 for FY21 with a commitment to implement full ADK in the coming years following more guidance regarding the SOA rollout and implications for ADK. Paul Murphy seconded the motion. Amy Krishnamurthy offered a friendly amendment to add, “and to use \$180,000 of E&D to pay for it”. Adam accepted the amendment.

Adam emphasized that this would show commitment by the Committee to All Day Kindergarten, but without a set timeline given that more significant financial information will be coming. (This is similar to Option A which included a 3-4 year timeline.) After much discussion, including the suggestion to keep motions as concise as possible and not bind the hands of future Committees, members were ready to vote.

The Committee **VOTED** on the motion and it passed.

(YES: Baum, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Shine
- weighted vote of 15.5 NO: Bo, Petersen, Tso – weighted vote of 6)

4. ONGOING BUSINESS

4.1. **Approval of Minutes of Meeting on 11/21/19 and 12/5/19 (next meeting) – VOTE** –
John Petersen moved, Paul Murphy seconded and the minutes of 11/21/19 were approved. The minutes of 12/5/19 will be considered at the next meeting.

4.2. **School Building Committee– Peter Light, Adam Klein**

4.2.1. Next Steps

4.2.2. Meeting Minutes

Mr. Light reported that interviews were held for construction management firms and Consigli Construction Co. Inc. was chosen. They look forward to having them on board by January 1st. The Scope and Budget Agreement should be coming from the MSBA soon.

4.3. **Subcommittee Business**

4.3.1. Policy – Amy Krishnamurthy

4.3.1.1. **Public Participation, File:BEDH - First Read**

Changes are increasing speaking time from 2 to 3 minutes and bullet #5 has been reviewed by district’s counsel as a result of the recent case in Natick. Comments may be sent to Amy by Jan 3 for consideration in the Second Read on 1/9/20. It was suggested that it be clarified in the policy when (during the meeting) speakers should say something. Others felt that was procedural. The reference to email was appreciated and when people email before they comment.

4.3.1.2. **Tutoring for Pay, File: GCRD – Second Read – VOTE**

Tessa McKinley and Diane Baum recused themselves due to their conflicts of interest. Adam Klein ran this business item as the Vice Chair. Additional comments regarding distinguishing tutoring for pay from tutoring free of charge, were included since the Second Read version was posted.

Paul Murphy moved, John Petersen seconded and it was,
VOTED: to approve the Tutoring for Pay policy as revised.

4.3.2. Budget – *Diane Baum*

Due to a snow day, the meeting scheduled for 12/17/19 was held on 12/19/19. The numbers in the superintendent’s memo were reviewed, as well as possible changes to the Budget Binder for next month’s Budget Saturday (1/25/20).

Adam Klein updated that the Capital Improvement subcommittee met on Dec 11 and began discussing next steps including how they can provide more transparency around the life cycle of the projects.

4.4. **School Committee Liaison Reports**

4.4.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG)

Diane Baum reported on the 12/13/19 meeting. The school assessment was at a 3.98% increase so this reduced number will be very helpful given the current \$900,000 deficit in the proposed budget for the Town. The Town’s Budget presentation is Jan 8th.

Dave Verdolino reported that that OPEB Board of Advisors held their annual meeting with the Trust Advisors and he will present a report at a future School Committee meeting.

4.5. **CONSENT AGENDA**

4.5.1. Recommendation to Approve Donation from O’Connor Studio to the Gates School
– **VOTE**

4.5.2. Recommendation to Approve Award Donation from the MA Science & Engineering Fair and Sanofi Genzyme Corp. to the ABRHS Science Department –
VOTE

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the consent agenda with gratitude.

4.6. **Statement of Warrants - *Tessa McKinley***

The Chairperson read the warrant figures into the record and the Committee members signed the documents.

5. **FYI**

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda with list of documents used