
Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Workshop
Approved Minutes
July 21, 2022 6:00 PM
Administration Building Room 13

We are not necessarily thinking machines. We are feeling machines that think.
(Antonio Damasio - neuroscientist)

Members Present: Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (8:10 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang
Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Liz Fowlks
Others: Tony Bent, Peter Light, Beth Petr

I. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

Welcome: Adam Klein, Peter Light

Adam welcomed members to the workshop and said at the conclusion of the meeting, he would be ready to “pass the torch” of the Chairperson to Kyra Cook. Peter introduced Tony Bent.

Comments: Tony Bent

Tony commended the Committee for taking the time to do an annual workshop. Referring to the quote that people are “feeling machines that think” he suggested that this focus is the underpinning for everything. Leaders need to understand that the emotional part of the brain is a key to success. Leadership isn’t “by the numbers”. He shared one of his favorite poems is by John O’Donohue, *For a Leader*, about perspective in leadership and the importance of “deep listening”. The traditional definition of empathy is that you can walk in someone else’s shoes, but it is actually impossible to do that. Brene Brown suggests that empathy is the ability is to listen deeply and believe that the other person really believes what you are hearing.

II. Warm-up Activity

Members shared where they grew up, what it was like and an interesting experience from childhood, then introduced each other to the group. All of these experiences determine how people act.

III. Roles and Responsibilities Review

Tony referred to the School Committee “Big Three” (MGL Ch 71 Section 37):

- The Superintendent
- Budget
- Policy

The School Committee is like a board of directors. They should not get too into the weeds. Advocacy plays out through community engagement and supporting the

school system. There's a strong relationship between the strength of a community's culture and the School Committee. This strongly influences how a Committee weathers challenges. Areas of School Committee responsibility are technically the only areas that School Committee members can be criticized for.

Members discussed public participation at meetings and how that can be handled effectively. School Committee members all over the country have been yelled at and berated these past couple years making things often very difficult. A member added that they feel safe when they know the other members have each other's backs. Tony pointed out that issues are often not problems to be solved, but to be managed by finding strategies. Taking a recess or a pause for a few minutes during a meeting can be very helpful. Everyone needs to do their fair share of the Committee's work. A member added that when people come and present an opinion, they have their own reasons for doing that. The danger is confusing the reasons and opinions and thinking they are the same. Assuming the intent of the speaker is a mistake.

The Superintendent is responsible for:

- Managing the system (MGL Ch 71 Section 59)
- Implementing school committee policy
- Adhering to State and Federal Laws

IV. **Engaging the Community: Communication and Participation**

Members discussed M. Peterson's article, *School board's role in communications*.

Comments included:

- Very important to get to know the other town officials that members work with.
- Acton's Leadership Group (ALG) and Boxborough's Leadership Forum (BLF) are extremely valuable especially when there is disagreement. It is essential to have relationships with people with whom you disagree.
- Relationships make all the difference in a positive way.
- Strong relationships are also need with the community, not only ALG and BLF, such as non-school parents and citizens and our seniors.
- Clear communication, especially around Town Meeting times, is essential.
- The Community Engagement Subcommittee will work on this.
- Listening can be as important as telling.
- A monthly school committee update to the community might be helpful, as was done in the past, in addition to the Annual Report.
- Prepandemic, the Fincom would present their annual Point of View (POV) at a School Committee meeting and we should continue that now.
- A monthly communication plan for the Committee would be helpful.

V. **Concluding Comments**

Members agreed that workshops are an essential chance for the Committee to focus.

Andrew Schwartz moved, Kyra Cook seconded and the ABRSC adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: Agenda, *School board's role in communications* (Margaret Peterson, Jan 2011), *For a Leader* (John O'Donohue), *New Day's Lyric* (Amanda Gorman '22)