

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

January 7, 2021

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

7:00 p.m.

To call in: 312 626 6799

Live streaming: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum (8:00 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: none

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

1. **Call to Order**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley.

She noted that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar with the following 10 members in attendance via zoom: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. Diane Baum was expected at about 8:00. Per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The Chair stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org.

a. **Chairperson's Welcome** - *Tessa McKinley*

b. **ABRHS Student Representative Update** - *Rhik Mazumder*

Rhik shared his perspective on the current hybrid schedule. Many students feel it is better than all remote due to the social benefit of being in-person at least a few days a week. Extended screen time is difficult, as well as getting up early.

c. **Public Participation**

Due to the racial zoom incident that occurred at the 12/17/20 meeting, the Committee is increasing the security of their meetings and will require the public to state their name and address before being allowed to speak. Four members spoke. One person was in support and appreciation for the Committee's decision to retire the mascot and one against it. Another speaker expressed concern over the zoom bombing incident and urged people to try to have more one-on-one conversations. A final person appreciated Rhik's comments about remote learning stating that he feels the same way at his work.

Tessa read a statement correcting information that was shared the past few weeks by members of the public regarding the process leading up to the decision to retire the Colonial mascot. She concluded that the Committee will not reconsider their unanimous decision. See attached.

d. **Superintendent's Update** – *Peter Light*

Mr. Light's update included: COVID developments, update on incidents at 12/17 and 1/7 ABRSC meetings, MCAS Testing for FY21, Building Project update

regarding GMP being determined and an FY22 budget update. The next community coffee with the Superintendent and School Committee chair will be February 3 from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. All are invited. Mr. Light noted that the recent tax bills sent to residents included a noticeable increase especially in Acton due to the building project and other projects approved by voters.

2. NEW BUSINESS

a. Student Learning Time Survey and VOTE on Changes or Waiver for Hybrid Program - *Peter Light*

The results from the structured learning time surveys given to stakeholders prior to the break were reviewed. The district must either apply for a waiver of the learning time regulations to the DESE or make adjustments to the hybrid program prior to January 19. Waiver requests must be submitted by January 11. The district will be implementing the daily “live” check-ins for all students consistent with the regulation, but the Administration would like to request a waiver of the 35 hour minimum requirement for live instruction in hybrid programs. Although DESE does not require the Committee to vote this, Mr. Light asked for members’ support.

Comments included:

- Would we be missing opportunities to provide extra services for students with special education needs by requesting this waiver? A: DESE is very specific that if time does not apply to all students, it cannot be counted in the total learning time. Mr. Light would also be concerned about changing families’ routines in the middle of the year for a number of reasons.
- Diane Baum listened to DESE’s meeting and noted that students’ mental health was the real concern. She felt we were handling this area well.

Diane Baum moved that the School Committee support the District’s request for a waiver from DESE on structured learning time. Adam Klein seconded the motion.

Comments continued:

- When we look at the FY22 Budget, we need to attempt to close the gaps that have been created.
- What are we doing about the survey results that say only 30% of our high school students are satisfied? A: An extensive student engagement survey is being launched to better understand this. The administration will also look at how much asynchronous learning is being provided.
- More in-person learning time is being considered for some of our special education students.

Several members of the public shared their thoughts and concerns, identifying themselves by name and address.

At approximately 8:43 p.m., a member of the public gave a name and local address and proceeded to play several seconds of profanity laced music

including the “n” word, before he was cut off. Tessa stated that the racial incident would be followed up on.

She called for a vote on the motion that had been seconded earlier. Members unanimously **VOTED by roll call** and approved the motion to support the District’s request for the waiver.

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

Tessa stated that the Committee would not stand for any more harassment of their members. She apologized again to Evelyn and Kyra for having to experience another disturbing incident at a meeting. Mr. Light also apologized. Tessa invited members to speak if they wished to.

Kyra Cook asked everyone to stop and consider that someone choose to call two of our School Committee members the “n” word in their capacity of service to everyone’s children. She suggested that everyone “Bear witness that this abuse has happened.” Evelyn agreed.

The Committee took a 5 minute break at 8:48 p.m.

When the meeting resumed, Tessa said that this second incident might jeopardize future public participation at meetings. People may need to email questions to the Committee.

b. FY22 School Calendar - First Read – Peter Light

Mr. Light reviewed the two proposed versions. Option 1 begins on August 30 and option 2 begins on September 8. The religious holidays of Good Friday, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are no school days, as has been done for many years in the District given the number of staff and students who would take those days off. Starting on August 30th would be a “choppy” start given the Friday before and Labor Day being off, compared to starting on September 8 which would make the last day of June 21 if no snow days. It was noted that DESE may not allow remote snow days next year. In the spirit of diversity and inclusion, Evelyn Abayaah-Issah asked if any of the muslim holidays could be incorporated into the calendar as no school days. Tessa responded that in a year where a wider calendar discussion is planned, that could be considered, as it has been in the past. Tessa served on the Calendar Subcommittee several years ago. There has to be a clear reason that a holiday impacts the student or teacher population for school not to be held. Evelyn agreed to wait until the next opportunity. Members were asked to email input on the proposed options before the next meeting to Peter and Beth. The calendar will be voted at the meeting on 1/21/21.

c. Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan - VOTE – FIRST READ – Peter Light

This was changed to a First Read with the vote at the next meeting to give members more time to read the material. Some of it was discussed last year. Funding for AB would not be received until year 5 or 6, if ever. We picked the target area of literacy as the area where we wanted to improve student outcomes. Mr. Light invited members and the public to email him and copy Beth Petr if they had feedback on the proposed plan. Although the submission to DESE deadline is January 15th, it was agreed that it would best to take the extra time and have a better plan.

In response to a question, Mr. Light said that the DEI Family Advisory Group and Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) could review the document and a revision could be submitted if necessary. It was requested that students with disabilities be added to the bullets on the first page. Mr. Light said ELL students would also be included. This is a two year plan that asks the District to identify students that need the most support and how we will address their needs. The comment was made that these literacy skills are foundational to students' lives.

3. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. **Consent Agenda - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

- i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 12/17/20 and 12/23/20 – **VOTE**
- ii. Approval of \$4,000 Donation from the Friends of the Acton Libraries to the 8 school libraries of the ABRSD – **VOTE**

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call**: to approve the consent agenda with gratitude. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

b. **ABRSC FY21 Operating Protocols - Second Read - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

The protocols were first reviewed at the workshop in October with Tony Bent. Tessa reviewed the proposed changes.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved to approve the protocols. Kyra Cook seconded. Adam suggested adding something about the need to identify systemic racism in our community and the work to be done to address it. It was agreed that Adam and Nora would review the protocols and bring a new version to the next meeting for the Committee's consideration. Amy withdrew her motion. There was no objection.

c. **Superintendent Goals 2020-2021 - Second Read - VOTE - Peter Light**

John Petersen moved to approve the Superintendent's Goals as presented. Ginny Kremer seconded.

Mr. Light explained the edits that were made in response to feedback from the previous meeting. Several members felt the goals were ambitious and wondered if they should be scaled back to be more realistic given the priority that the pandemic has taken and continues to demand. Mr. Light described most of the goals as "work in progress". Although he may not complete them all, Mr. Light feels that significant progress is often as good as accomplishing a goal. John Petersen urged Mr. Light to be ambitious and set the bar slightly higher than you think, just as we do for our students and staff.

Members **VOTED by roll call** and unanimously approved the motion.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

- d. **Budget Update** - The first FY22 Budget Presentation will be at the next meeting.
 - i. *Discussion of Reserves Policy DK - Adam Klein*
The Budget subcommittee felt the Committee as a whole should review the Reserves policy and be clear that it sets a target reserve level of between 4% and 5% of operating expenses, not a requirement for E&D. MA General Laws limit regional school districts' total E&D to no more than 5% of the budget.
- e. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**
 - i. Building Committee: Final GMP 12/15/20 & Approved Minutes
This was covered in the Superintendent's Update by Mr. Light.
- f. **Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – T McKinley**
Tessa McKinley moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: see motion on memo.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)
- g. **FYI** – Mr. Light highlighted several items below.

4. Adjourn

Adam Klein moved, Evelyn Abayaah-Issah seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call to adjourn the ABRSC meeting at 9:54 p.m.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

NEXT MEETINGS (via zoom):

ABRSC: January 21 and February 4 at 7:00 p.m.

Next Community Coffee with the Superintendent & ABRSC Chair: February 3rd 7-8 p.m.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION (FYI)

- a. **ABRSC Racism Condemnation Statement, voted 12/23/20**
- b. **FY22 Budget Schedule, voted 11/19/20**
- c. **Acton 2021 Annual Election Calendar**
- d. **Boxborough Candidate's Checklist - Running for Town Office**
- e. **Thank you to Lueders Environmental, Inc. for \$75 Donation**
- f. **QPR Training: Next one: Jan 5 at 7**
- g. **DESE FY21 Assessment and Accountability Update, 1/5/2021**

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

Chairperson Tessa McKinley's statement

Public Participation

ABRSC Meeting 1/7/2021

As a committee, we rarely respond to comments and questions raised during public speak. The reason for this is that they are often items outside of the agenda. I need to clarify a few things, however, because over the course of the last few weeks, a few members of the community have persisted in presenting information that is incorrect. I understand that there are members of the community who disagree with our unanimous vote to retire the colonial mascot. They have persisted in presenting their concerns at all of our meetings since the decision was made. So, let me clarify. Prior to our decision to retire the mascot, all members of the committee were aware that two petitions had been created. While we were aware of both petitions, let me be clear: only ONE petition was officially presented to the committee (with all of its signatures) and that was created by the students of ABSEJ in their efforts to retire the mascot. In our efforts to understand the perspectives of all stakeholders, a request went out on September 25 for public comment.

“The Committee recognizes that the Acton-Boxborough community includes many members and groups who may have a variety of views on the issue before the Committee. The School Committee will deliberate on the petition again and consider action at its meeting on October 15, 2020. We invite the public to submit comments in writing by Wednesday, October 14th by emailing us at abrsc@abschools.org. While we recognize that public comment is not a vote, we are interested in hearing a variety of opinions on changing the mascot to help make our deliberation more meaningful.”

The creators of the petition to keep the mascot DID write to the committee and they DID meet with the superintendent about their concerns. When the students wrote to us originally, they made clear their desire to remain anonymous. The original request they made was to meet with the committee between meetings. Because we are a public body, we cannot as a committee meet with individuals outside of our open meetings, so the Superintendent met with them. One of these students later emailed us again as part of our request for public comment. The student made us aware of the second petition and that it had 2300 signatures, but the petition was not sent to us. Regardless, when we met to deliberate, we met with the knowledge of its existence and that there was a large group in the community who wished to preserve the colonial mascot.

We have heard comments that all sides were not represented but this is not accurate. As our request stated explicitly, public comment was NOT going to be considered a vote. Our mailboxes were flooded with comment; nearly 700 emails were received and read. While there were many impassioned letters about the merits of keeping the colonial, most of the responses we received from people interested in maintaining the mascot, were simply names with a subject line of “keep the colonial.” Let me repeat: This was not a public vote and it was never intended to be. As many members noted in the statements on 10/15, we all spent many hours reading the comments of our community members. Not only did we receive letters from current students and staff, we received letters from alumni, community members and elected officials. This unanimous decision was not made in a silo and it was made with the support of the high school principal and the superintendent as well as other members of the leadership team.

One of the most passionate community members wrote a letter that was shared by many who wished to keep the mascot. That member of ABRHS class of '89 was impassioned in his defense of the values he felt were at the core of the colonial mascot. After our unanimous decision, he again wrote to the committee.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'd just like to say well done. Thank you for the well considered discussion of the retirement of the Colonial. You are each a credit to the town. I logged into the meeting very much in favor of keeping the Colonial. I left convinced that its retirement was the right thing for the school. I am prayerful that the community can quickly decide on a new mascot that all students can claim as their own. “

I understand that we are not all going to agree but to claim that we did not listen or consider all perspectives is false. This decision has been made by unanimous consent. We, as a committee, have many other responsibilities to the students of our district and we will not be reconsidering our vote.