

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

January 21, 2021

To attend webinar: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/99162690993>

7:00 p.m.

To call in: 301 715 8592

9:00 p.m. Executive Session

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

To submit public comment to be read at meeting: abrsc_public_comment@abschools.org

(public comment to be read at meeting must be submitted by 2:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting)

Members Present: Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang
Members Absent: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah
Others: Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. **Call to Order**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 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: Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. Evelyn Abayaah-Issah was absent. 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**

- i. Recommendation to Temporarily Suspend Public Participation Policy
BEDH - **VOTE** - Tessa McKinley

Due to the another incident of zoom disruption at the last School Committee meeting, the Chairperson and Superintendent decided to change public participation by requiring people to email comments prior to the meeting. Because additional comments or questions would not be accepted at the meeting, the current Public Participation policy BEDH needed to be suspended per the Suspension of Policies policy BGF. As required, this decision will be reviewed at the next meeting. Mr. Light spoke to a number of IT professionals, local experts and the Attorney General's office to try to find a better way to include the public, although as the Chair pointed out, School Committee meetings are business meetings held in public. They are not meant to be public forums.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: to temporarily suspend Public Participation at School Committee Meetings policy BEDH.
(YES: Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

- b. **Public Comment** - *Please see note in the heading above*
Vice Chairperson Adam Klein read six emails that had been received from the public for this meeting. He spent up to 3 minutes on each. Four authors spoke about the mascot decision, two about the change to structured learning time/more inperson learning, and one also included comment regarding the importance of public participation.
- c. **Superintendent's Update** – *Peter Light*
Mr. Light read a statement written in response to the Acton Selectboard Chairperson requesting an apology at the recent ALG meeting. See attached.

2. PRESENTATIONS

- a. **World Language Single Entry Level** - *Sinikka Savukoski, Department Leader of World Languages at the High School*
Due to the impact of the pandemic on students' world languages this year, and in an effort to provide more equitable access to students during their freshman year, a single entry level for freshmen will be implemented in the fall. This will provide alignment across all languages offered and does not impact available choices for students in grades 10-12. Ms. Savukoski was asked to present due to the significance of this change. Members found it very interesting and informative. A member appreciated that Ms. Savukoski pointed out that language instruction in a hybrid model is not the same as in an in-person model due to the lack of communication and practice. The department has talked about doing this for awhile and the need became obvious with the pandemic. It was noted that 100% of the World Language staff support this change.
- b. **Superintendent's Preliminary FY22 Budget** - *Peter Light, Dave Verdolino*
 - i. Budget Subcommittee Update - *Adam Klein*
 - ii. Acton Leadership Group Update -*J. Petersen/A. Krishnamurthy*
 - iii. Boxborough Leadership Forum Update - *Tessa McKinley*

Because the community asked for more input earlier in the budget process, this year's approach will be a little different. The combined pressure from the pandemic and having one community (Acton) at the tax levy limit also must be kept in mind. The "high level" presentation was based on Boxborough Town Meeting being prior to Acton's since Acton Town Meeting is now postponed to the end of June. Assumptions are made that students will return to the classrooms in the fall and the Remote Learning Program will no longer be an option. The difficulty in predicting what will actually happen was acknowledged. Dave reported that President Biden seems to be planning to offer more reimbursements for covid expenses so that could be very helpful.

This preliminary budget for FY22 is \$100,525,643, an increase of 3.73% from FY21. At this level, the assessment for Acton would be an increase of 4.39% and Boxborough's would be 5.97%. This budget proposes to use \$965,000 of E&D (reduced from \$1,145,000 in FY21), \$3.6M in circuit breaker, \$200,000 from the

Transportation Stabilization fund (new), and \$150,000 of Capital Stabilization (new).

Preliminary Questions and Feedback:

Mr. Light said a budget tutorial could be set up for members who would like to learn more about the budget process. Dave will send out information.

Adam reported that he and John reviewed the proposed budget for the budget subcommittee last week. John stressed that to be meaningful, reserves should be discussed using the net use of reserves.

Diane emphasized that with the pandemic this year the details of the budget seem very confusing. Hitting tax payers with a 4.4% increase in Acton and almost 6% in Boxborough for assessments is “a big ask”. She is also concerned about E&D and if we are within our guidelines. MGL says if we have more than 5% in E&D, we have to apply it to reduce the assessments. She feels reserves should be for one time expenses only, and that level funding is not in Acton’s best interest. The level service budget is not sustainable. She would like to see this under 3%.

Mr. Light asked members what number they think the administration should be aiming for. He felt that they could probably get to 3% without damage to classrooms, but below that would and they would need to take a hard look at it.

Adam noted that every budget subcommittee meeting has the same discussion about E&D use. As the budget gets refined, there will be more movement. A decision will need to be made about priorities. In the past, members weren’t thinking very much about the tax rates of our communities and we now have to add that priority.

Tessa suggested that it is important to present a budget that shows everyone where we would be if we did what we are doing now for next year. This would allow everyone to start the discussion on the same page with a foundational basis. John added that when they presented at the Town Meetings last year, they presented a \$500,000 covid contingency and said that if it wasn’t spent, it would be returned. He wants to be clear about that message. Members were encouraged to send more comments and questions to Peter, Dave and Marie.

ALG Update: John reported that the Acton Fincom presented their Point of View (POV) document and it is their desire to have no tax increase next year. Typically, what School Committee votes on aligns Acton and Boxborough but when it comes to assessments, the Towns have two different positions. When BLF meets to discuss spending money on schools, they are coming from a very different position than Acton due to Acton being at the levy limit, with a tax rate at the top. The ability to put additional dollars into the FY22 budget is very low.

BLF Update: Adam reported that BLF reaffirmed that their Town Meeting is on schedule. The preliminary assessment number was shared and they were also concerned about their 6% increase.

3. ONGOING BUSINESS

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

- i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 1/7/21 – **VOTE**
- ii. Approval of Anonymous Donation of \$627 to the Student Assistance - Homeless and Food Assistance Fund - **VOTE**
- iii. Approval of Donation of 3,000 No Place for Hate face masks for students and staff from the AB United Way – **VOTE**

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

VOTED by roll call: to approve the consent agenda.

(YES: Baum, Cook, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang Note: Ginny Kremer had stepped out for a moment.)

b. ***Structured Learning Time Update - Peter Light**

The waiver was not approved by DESE so changes had to be implemented this past week. The administration worked with staff, ABEA leadership, and others to figure this out and created a gradual implementation schedule. Some technical challenges required increased bandwidth that is being worked on with EdTech. Several members expressed frustration that no detail was provided in DESE's denial response. "The road blocks and unfunded mandates that government is putting on local districts is extremely disappointing. They don't understand what our educators are going through." Some school committees are writing letters about this. Members should let Tessa know if they would like to do this.

c. ***Recommendation to Approve Nonresident Tuition Rate for the RJGJHS STEP Program - VOTE - Peter Light (per policy JFABA) and Debbie Dixson**

Mr. Light explained that there could be an opportunity to expand our tuition program at the Junior High. Debbie Dixson has talked with colleagues about their different student programs. For many years, AB has accepted ODP and PACE students from other communities at the High School and there have inquiries regarding the feeder program at the Junior High level. Tuition would be set at the same as the High School because the services are comparable although the focus is different due to students' ages.

Noting his wholehearted support because this includes kids in the mainstream program, Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the nonresident tuition rate for the RJGJHS Secondary Transition Education Program (STEP) as presented.

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

d. **FY22 School Calendar - Second Read - VOTE - Marie Altieri**

There has been no significant feedback or changes since the last meeting. Marie reported that after working with the ABEA, the administration recommends that Elementary Early Release Days stay on Wednesdays going forward.

Members shared opposing views of the start and end dates being proposed.

Comments included:

- The later start date gives us more time to get over covid.
- Start earlier because covid is safer in the summer weather
- A June 21 end date is so late. Kids are signed up for summer activities and not focused.
- August weather is good for a later start, as June is for an earlier end.
- Neither option is great, but we shouldn't base it on covid assumptions.
- We do not know if remote snow days would be permitted.

Marie answered some questions about the preschool hours for next year.

Adam Klein moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was

VOTED by roll call: to approve option 1 with a start date for students of August 30, 2021 and staff professional days scheduled on August 25 and 26. The last day of school would be June 15, 2022 plus snow days. Elementary early release days are scheduled on Wednesdays. 14.5 to 6 (YES: Kremer, Tso, Klein, Cook, Baum, Wang, McKinley = 14.5 NO: Petersen, Shine, Krishnamurthy = 6) Weighted vote: YES: 5 Acton x 2.5 = 12.5 plus 2 Boxborough x 1 = 14.5 vs. NO: 2 Acton x 2.5 = 5 plus 1 Boxborough = 6

- e. **Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan** - Second Read - **VOTE** - *Peter Light*
The Student Opportunity Act was designed by the Legislature to help districts focus attention on certain underserved groups of students in their schools. We believe our reading program will benefit everyone, but we believe it will specifically help with these groups. It is not expected that AB will receive any funding for several years, although we are required to submit a plan.

Diane Baum moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the Student Opportunity Act Plan.
(YES: Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

- f. **ABRSC FY21 Operating Protocols** - Third Read - **VOTE** - *Tessa McKinley*
Adam Klein moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: to approve with gratitude the ABRSC FY21 Operating Protocols as proposed.
(YES: Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

- g. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

- i. **Policy** - *Diane Baum (meeting on 1/15/21)*

The subcommittee intends to present the new Workforce Diversity policy at the next meeting for a First Read.

- ii. **Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve** – **VOTE**

Tessa moved, Adam seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: see memo

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

h. **FYI**

Mr. Light thanked the anonymous donors to the Student Assistance Fund and highlighted the ongoing QPR trainings.

He noted that the EDCO Annual Reports and Audit Report are very important to read. It is significant that they contain a statement that says EDCO may not be able to continue.

4. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:55 p.m., Tessa stated the need for an executive session, to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21(a) purpose (3): to discuss strategy with respect to litigation because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the Committee. This was in regard to the financial position of the Educational Collaborative (EDCO) and possible future litigation. She stated that the Committee would not return to open session.

Adam Klein made the motion, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously **VOTED by roll call** to enter executive session.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

Next Community Coffee with the Superintendent & ABRSC Chair: February 3rd 7-8 p.m.
Note: "Budget Saturday" previously scheduled for Jan 23 is cancelled.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION (FYI)

- a. **Thank You to Anonymous Donor for \$250 for the Student Assistance Fund**
- b. **FY22 Budget Schedule**, voted 11/19/20
- c. **Acton 2021 Annual Election Calendar**
- d. **Boxborough 2021 Annual Election Calendar & Candidate's Checklist**
- e. **QPR Training**: Learn the 3 simple steps to save a life from suicide. Click on this [QPR Training Flyer](#) for details and to sign up online. Next one: Feb 24 at 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
- f. **Monthly Student Enrollment**, 1/14/21
- g. **EDCO Collaborative FY20 Annual Report and Audit Report**