

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

Virtual Public Meeting

March 18, 2021

To attend: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

7:00 p.m. Open Meeting

7:05 p.m. Annual Budget Hearing

7:20 p.m. (approximately) Return to Business Meeting

To preregister for Public Comment **(required)**:

https://abschools.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_hIT6SHp9RB6BY9NgDFz4Rw

(pre-registration must be submitted 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting)

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah (left at 8:30 and returned at 9:00 p.m.), Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer (left at 8:55 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

Members Absent: Nora Shine,

Others: Marie Altieri, 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 stated that the following members were in attendance in the auditorium: Diane Baum, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, John Petersen, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. The following were participating via zoom: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Kyra Cook and Amy Krishnamurthy. Nora Shine 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.

2. Chairperson's Welcome

In an ongoing effort to make our meeting as secure as possible, members of the public were asked to view the meeting using acton tv's youtube channel (found at the top of the agenda). Those who wished to comment during the meeting, were asked to register 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting using the link also found at the top of the agenda.

3. FY22 BUDGET HEARING *(see separate agenda)*

The Hearing was called to order by Tessa McKinley at 7:05 p.m.

- **Chairman's Introduction**

It was explained that per Robert's Rules, the Committee would vote after the Hearing was adjourned.

- **ABRSC FY22 Budget Overview– Peter Light and Dave Verdolino**

1. FY22 Final Budget Presentation – starts at slide 82
2. Recommended Assessments and Table 6

Mr. Light began the presentation saying that “Uncertainty is the key for this budget.” given the year of pandemic. The key early assumption made is full in-person programming for all students. No changes were made from what was presented two weeks ago with the exception of a small revision to the assessments, with no change to the budget amount of \$99,719,222.

- **Budget Feedback and Public Participation**

Members appreciated the thoughtful presentation. There was a discussion of how much more federal relief might be coming to the schools. Dave said there are still lots of questions. Funds will flow to the communities like the CARE funds did. Regional school districts are then eligible to receive funds from their communities. It looks like there could be \$7.1M. It is not known if we will present concrete proposals for projects such as we did for the Food Insecurity Program or not. Mr. Light noted that both Town Managers have been extremely collaborative and understanding about the school districts’ needs. Guidance regarding the CARES Act money has not been given yet. Applying for ESSR3 funds will be similar to the first and second rounds. Funds will be available for us through September 2024. We will need to come up with a spending plan and prioritize things. The increased flexibility of the new funds is very helpful.

In response to a question, it was explained that the federal funds (like ESSR) are not included in the budget and they do not affect the FY22 assessment because they do not go into the general fund. When received, they are set aside for specific qualified expenses. These funds are not tax relief they are reimbursement for school expenses due to the pandemic. Mr. Light noted however that by using the funds for qualified expenses, it could increase the amount of turnback at the end of the year.

Audience members were invited to ask questions.

Steve Ballard stated that guidance on March 3, 2021 for ESSR2 says that up to 75% of Town’s ESSR2 funding may be given to their schools so the 40% that AB received is not a lot in his opinion and he hopes the District will push for more from the towns from ESSR3. He also stated that the School Committee and Budget Subcommittee did not deliberate on the budget at all this year. He criticized the disparity between the approach to multiyear plans such as the capital plan (immediately get it back on track to catch up) vs. the All Day Kindergarten plan (picking up where we left off), and that the budget puts fiscal sustainability ahead of students’ needs.

- **Adjourn**

At 7:36 p.m., John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the FY22 Budget Hearing.

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

RETURN TO BUSINESS MEETING (7:37 p.m.)

3. **Recommendation to Approve the FY22 Final ABRSD Budget and Assessments - VOTE - Peter Light**

John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 be set at \$99,719,222, and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$67,543,928 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$5,634,248 and an Operating Assessment of \$61,909,680); and

Boxborough \$12,676,080 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$952,358 and an Operating Assessment of \$11,723,722);

With the remainder to be accounted for by the following sources of funds:

- Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$15,341,311;
- Anticipated State Transportation Aid in the amount of \$1,930,403;
- Anticipated State Charter School Aid in the amount of \$100,000;
- Anticipated Medicaid Reimbursement of \$250,000;
- Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$265,000;
- Estimated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$17,500;

And transfers from the following District reserves:

- Excess & Deficiency Fund in the amount of \$1,245,000;
- Transportation Stabilization Fund in the amount of \$200,000;
- Capital Stabilization Fund in the amount of \$150,000.

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

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

Angie Tso read a statement regarding the recent deadly tragedy against Asians in Atlanta (attached). Members expressed their gratitude for her words. Evelyn Abayaah-Issah added that this fight is not just for one group. It is about all of us and we have to think about it as everyone in America together as one.

a. **Student Representative Update** – next meeting

b. **Public Participation** - *Please see note in the heading above*

ABEA President Mike Balulescu spoke in defense of the teachers and administrators that have worked so hard to ensure our students get the best educational possible during this pandemic year, contrary to several comments made by members of the public at the last School Committee meeting.

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

- i. *Recommendation to Appoint ABRSD Special Education Director - **VOTE**
Mr. Light welcomed Jennifer Truslow to the meeting and recommended to the Committee that she be appointed.

Diane Baum moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED by roll call**: to appoint Ms. Jennifer Truslow to the position of Director of Special Education, serving as the Administrator of Special Education effective July 1, 2021.

- ii. Transition to In-Person Schooling Update (*oral*) –

Mr. Light updated the Committee on the new Leadership staff - Joanie Dean, Jennifer Truslow, and now two finalists for the McT principal position.

He informed members on the groups returning to school. We cannot transition our half day kindergarten to full day due to staffing for this rest of this year. Grades 1-6 transition will happen April 5. Thanks to a lot of creativity and work, all 125 students have been placed into their home school classes. This is great for the kids and families.

The Junior High will transition back on Wednesday, April 28 due to furniture moves that will happen over the vacation. A very high percentage of families want to return from Remote Learning Program to in person and that may mean the Junior High has to make significant changes to the team structures.

It was announced today that the High School will return on May 3, due to the many complexities with High School classes that needed to be worked out. Seniors will return for 3 weeks before graduation. A survey will go to families to see who wants to transition. In person Graduation and end of year activities are being planned. Graduation is moved to Thursday, June 3 with a rain date of Friday, June 4. Larry and his team have done amazing work to pull this together.

Everyone is very excited to have the students returning although there is a lot of work to be done before they arrive. Mr. Light thanked everyone for making it happen. Members were very grateful. Ginny noted that the State has not been helpful throughout this year, “burdening our town and school district with little resources”. John agreed noting that their “failure to act in a timely way on Beacon Hill and failing to take positions on difficult issues” has made it worse by dodging the hard questions.

5. **PRESENTATION**

- a. **Math at the R.J. Grey Junior High School - Deborah Bookis, Andrew Shen, David Lawrence**

Members thoroughly appreciated the presentation on the permanent change being made to math at the Junior High based on the trial this year. All 7th graders will take “7th Grade Math” and in 8th grade, all students will take either 8th Grade Math or Algebra I.

Deborah Bookis explained that the equity piece is students' access to the material. When leveled, the gap gets wider and wider and some students don't get access to what others are learning. It is not easy to teach a range of students like this but we are partnering with other districts to learn how they have been successful. Mr. Light added that he had the experience of opening AP classes to all students, and it increased success greatly for many students. A myth in our education world is that students have a fixed ability around their ceiling. Evidence shows that when you eliminate barriers to high level course work, you don't decrease the high level performance, you bring everyone up. When you provide each student with rigorous content and provide all the supports for students entering at different levels, it raises the bar for all of them. Mr. Light thinks we will see more and more students being able to access higher level math classes and then maybe we will condense the lower level math sections. This was his experience as a High School principal for many years. In answer to a question, he said that outside programs emphasize computational math and it can make students one-sided where speed and course work is their strength. Theoretical understanding of math is key and they can come together.

6. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. **Approval of Meeting Minutes of 3/4/21 and 3/11/21 – VOTE** - Tessa McKinley

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously

VOTED by roll call: to approve the minutes of March 4, 2021.

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

It was agreed to vote the minutes of March 11th at the next meeting.

b. **Kindergarten Registration Update** - Marie Altieri

Marie updated the Committee saying that we budgeted for the correct number of Kindergarten sections at 17. All Day Kindergarten (ADK) tuition will stay the same for next year at \$3750.

Diane Baum commented on the number of families that continue to want ADK. She advocated strongly for moving in that direction, even if they can't wait for the budget or the state to catch up with funding it. Scholarships are available on a sliding scale for families in need. John Petersen followed up on Diane's comment saying that it is wrong to say if we want to do something that something else won't be affected. While he welcomes the opportunity to look at ADK or other items, he asked what would be given up to make it happen.

c. **Proposed Resolutions for Consideration by ABRSC**

- i. **VOTE** to Support Resolution #1: MCAS and High Stakes Testing - in favor of canceling the MCAS and ACCESS tests this year
Because this resolution is self explanatory and has been discussed previously, Tessa suggested members vote on the first one and hold the second, in Ginny's absence.

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to approve the first resolution as written.

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

- ii. **VOTE** to Support Resolution #2: Return our Youngest Learners on April 5th - in opposition to House Docket #4101
This will be considered at the next meeting.

d. **Subcommittee and Members' Reports (8:45)**

i. **Building Committee - Adam Klein**

1. *Naming Policy and Procedures*

A Naming Committee needs to be formed. Adam asked for two volunteers from School Committee. The name is needed by end of 2021 calendar year. The commitment would involve community outreach to get more members and solicit suggestions. Amy Krishnamurthy volunteered. Other volunteers should email Tessa and Amy.

ii. **Policy - Diane Baum**

1. Curriculum and Instructional Materials, File: IGA - *Second Read - VOTE*

2. Adoption of New Courses & Programs, File: IGD (new) - *Second Read – VOTE*

Diane thanked everyone for their substantial feedback on these policies. It will be brought back to the subcommittee and a new version will be presented at School Committee on April 1.
Additional comments should be sent to Diane before next Friday.

e. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: see memo

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

f. **FYI**

The Emerson Hospital Community Health survey link was highlighted.

BLF met and Boxborough Town Meeting appears to be moving to Saturday, June 12.

7. Adjourn

At 9:45 p.m. John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded, and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: to adjourn.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

Statement read by Angie Tso

at the School Committee Meeting on March 18, 2021

It's so tragic to see what happened in Atlanta. What is most upsetting to me is that it is not until something tragic happens that we become awakened. We have #BlackLivesMatter, now added #StopAsianHate, will we add more? Do Asians, who are viewed as the "model minority", experience racism? On ABC news, it stated that Asian Americans were considered a high-risk group even before the pandemic. In addition, Asian Americans have always had to live with invisibility because Asian Americans are viewed as a group that's upwardly mobile and not in need of extra help or attention. In history, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the only US law to exclude a particular ethnic group. Rock Springs Massacre, Tacoma riot, and other incidents targeted Chinese just to mention a few. Recently, the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University found a 149% increase in anti-Asian crimes compared to 2019. In 2020 alone, there were more than 3800 reported Anti-Asian racist incidents, many others not reported.

As we all know, racist can have serious mental health impacts. Quote in one Maine news interview that I saw, "we are tired". Evelyn is exactly on point saying, "Enough is enough". Yes, Asian and Asian-Americans experience racism. Do our more than 30% Asian students feel they are accepted as who they are and not anything else? The work to stop racism will not end until any Asian-American, born and or raised in America, are no longer challenged with questions such as "where are you from?" Why do you speak English so well?" or mocked their culture. Asian-American are American, we all are American, nobody is at anything less.

I would like to see schools have proactive counseling that helps students to adequately respond when racism occurs. Enrich an environment that empowers students to speak up when racism occurred but not scared and post anonymously on social media. Anyone who is scared because of racism, please speak up. At the same time, as a community, we need to listen to different perspectives even if you disagree with them. Disagreement is different from racism. Make an effort to understand the background and why. It's challenging, but I will end at #ABStrong, tolerance and respect is here at AB, at the school committee, at all schools, and the community. I am looking forward to a safer and stronger AB and it starts from you and me.

Thank you for listening.