

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

October 1, 2020

To attend open meeting: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/95248771505> 6:00 p.m. Executive Session

To call in: 312 626 6799

7:00 p.m. Open Business Meeting

Live streaming: <http://actontv.org/on-demand/livestream/government>

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Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum (7:11 p.m.), Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine (left at 7:00 p.m.), Angie Tso, Yebin Wang (7:05 p.m.)

Members Absent: none

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

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1. **Call to Order (6:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order by Tessa McKinley at 6:06 p.m.

She noted that the meeting was being conducted both in person and remotely via a Zoom webinar and that members Kyra Cook, Amy Krishnamurthy and Nora Shine. Yebin Wang would be participating via zoom at 7:00. The following members were in the auditorium with Tessa: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, John Petersen, and Angie Tso. Diane Baum would also be coming at 7:00. Per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The meeting was being taped by Acton TV.

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION (6:00)**

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. She said that the Committee would return to open meeting at approximately 7:00.

John Petersen made the motion, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call** to enter executive session for the reason given.

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

The Committee returned to OPEN MEETING at 7:06 p.m.

3. **Chairperson's Welcome – Tessa McKinley**

Tessa McKinley read a statement thanking the 200 people who shared their thoughts regarding the petition to remove the AB mascot that was presented at the 9/17/20 School Committee meeting. In light of the district's commitment to examining the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools, the Committee will return to this issue at the meeting on Oct 15. In the meantime, everyone was encouraged to have a conversation with someone who doesn't share their opinion in an effort to find common ground and understanding. Tessa informed the public that the Oct 29<sup>th</sup> meeting will now be a Committee workshop and a new School Committee meeting will be on Nov 5.

4. **Public Participation – none**

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

One case of Covid19 has been reported at the High School although it is someone who was not in school leading up to the period when they tested positive. Notification is first sent to close contacts, then to the whole building. So far all has gone smoothly. Mr. Light thanked the local group who donated the “Be Kind” signs for our schools in honor of former Acton resident Carroll Spinney who created Big Bird. Members agreed that it is exciting to see activity in the schools again with “a tiny bit of normalcy”. Massachusetts communities have started ticking up in covid cases, so everyone needs to stay vigilant. AB publishes updated health metrics every Thursday on the website.

## 6. PRESENTATIONS

### 6.1 Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC)

Amanda Bailey, Carrie Weaver and Abe Gutierrez were welcomed as the SEPAC leadership. They presented their feedback form trends and 2020-2021 goals and priorities. These include:

- Monitor state guidance and families’ experiences regarding reopening schools
- Conduct parent/guardian survey(s)
- Address and remove barriers to SEPAC participation and SEPAC leadership for BIPOC parents/guardians of children with disabilities
- Participate in the search process for new special education director
- Community education on Basic Rights and other topics

Their survey will be published at end of this month and a formal report will be done in the spring. SEPAC will also provide feedback, as usual, as part of the budget process. In response to a request by a committee member, for any information about changes in parents’ hours, Amanda said that parents are being asked to document how much time it’s taking now to support their children and that will be shared. In response to being asked where SEPAC stands regarding some of the dyslexia recommendations presented at School Committee, Amanda replied that Debbie Dixson has provided information, but SEPAC has ongoing concern. There will be inevitable curriculum gaps this year, but there is concern that some hybrid elementary students may not be receiving all of the reading foundations instruction recommended.

## 7. ONGOING BUSINESS

### 7.1. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 9/17/20 – VOTE – Tessa McKinley

John Petersen moved, Adam Klein seconded and it was unanimously

**VOTED by roll call:** to approve the minutes of September 17, 2020 as amended.

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

### 7.2. Budget Update

#### 7.2.1. FY22 Budget Guidelines

The budget timeline will be delayed. The Acton Board of Selectmen is considering delaying Acton Annual Town Meeting so it is closer to Boxborough’s Town Meeting in May, as suggested at ALG. The timeline will be considered after this decision is made. The Committee was asked for comment on the budget guidelines before the Administration goes too far into the process. The draft has been reviewed by the Budget Subcommittee. Mr. Light will share the draft

strategic plan with the Committee even though it has not been voted yet because it will help members understand the guidelines, particularly bullet 6.

Comments included:

- Dave said that benchmarks for replenishing revolving accounts vary district to district and program to program. A benchmark is a measure of where we were. Due to the pandemic this is going to be difficult to compare.
- A member noted that having a big reserve is good, but it is coming from the taxpayers. We should avoid excessive community tax. Reserves depend a lot on the volatility of the operation, and right now there is maximum volatility.
- Round two of the CARES Act has just come out. We just received \$55,000 which is the first FEMA check for FY20 costs, so this will be revenue for FY21.
- A member asked, what is the key strategy or message of our budget? Mr. Light responded that that is actually the Committee's decision, and it is not just one thing. This is a difficult task in such an uncertain environment.
- Regarding bullets 3 and 5, a member stressed that they should be realistic, particularly given today's uncertainty. She wondered whether one or both of these should be combined with bullet 4. Another member liked the bullets as is because she understood them to say that the district prioritizes this kind of programming.
- Although it's important to be sensitive, the Committee has to give direction to the Administration and tell them what the most important priorities are, even when flexibility is required.
- Regarding bullet 5, specific groups of students were included because Mr. Light received input that this was more valuable than using general terms.
- Members want to be sure priority items are lined up if/when conditions improve.
- Budget Saturday will look different this year, especially given that it will be remote. More time will be needed upfront with the admin team so they can thoroughly think it through. Dave agreed, adding that a flexible budget is key.
- Because Acton Annual Town Meeting (ATM) drives our budget schedule, members should advocate that ATM be aligned with Boxborough's Town Meeting dates permanently. This would mean a delay of about 6 weeks.
- A member noted that after listening to the SEPAC report, the district could be facing an enormous gap for children who are not getting the foundational support they need. Remote instruction is not the ideal format.

### 7.3 Subcommittee and Member Reports

#### 7.3.1. Policy – *Diane Baum (met on 9/25/20)*

6.3.1.1 Subcommittees of the School Com (new), File: BDE - First Read  
The subcommittee proposed this new policy to codify what the Committee is doing regarding subcommittees. Diane asked for feedback on clause #2 about how members are appointed. It was suggested that procedures might be helpful. Not everyone agreed. Not having dates and timelines (as in procedures) provides flexibility. Defining what a subcommittee is, and perhaps what each reviews, is important for future committees. It was agreed that if the policy is clear, and the chair is comfortable as it's

written, procedures are not necessary. Although the slate of subcommittee members made up by the Chair used to be voted on by the Committee it has not been in recent years. Members generally felt the current method, with no voting, has worked.

7.3.1.2 Recommendation to Suspend Homework Policy, File: IKB - **VOTE** ( $\frac{2}{3}$  weighted vote required *per policy BGF*)

Given the nature of this school year and the different learning modes (In-person Hybrid and Fully Remote), it was recommended that this policy be suspended until the District returns to full in-person teaching. With the various schedules, this would mean that homework could be assigned over a long weekend or a holiday weekend. Assessments could also be assigned after long weekends. The intent is to preserve the continuity of student learning while being mindful of the need for social-emotional wellness and balance for students. This suspension is primarily due to when there is a long weekend. With our hybrid schedules, there could be 5 or 6 days of no homework allowed if the policy is in effect.

Understanding homework expectations is still important. There are 2 parts of the homework – quantity and quality, or synchronus and asynchronus. We have to be mindful of both pieces and achieve a balance of the two. A member asked if given that we are trying to keep Social Emotional Learning (SEL) at the forefront and minimize trauma, is there a way to edit the policy instead of suspending it? This was considered, but it was decided that homework should be left to the teacher’s discretion. AB has historically challenged the homework policies so Mr. Light was concerned that it would take too long to modify the policy. Some counselors at the high school told him that the kids were saying the amount of homework feels appropriate right now. The teachers are really recognizing the social emotional needs of the students and Mr. Light trusts their professional judgment. Strict guidelines do not work in a pandemic. They want to give staff the flexibility to keep the academic work flowing.

A member asked for clarification about what having no homework policy would mean. Mr. Light explained that the policy has rigid guidelines about when you can and cannot assign homework and assessments. This suspension would give staff more flexibility to assign work. The member asked if we are concerned about learning gaps, will having no guidelines create inconsistency among students depending on what class they’re in? Mr. Light replied that the current policy would prevent teachers from assigning homework or assessments due to holidays and the current structure for possibly an extended number of days.

A member stated that we have a unique opportunity because every other day, our students have to learn remotely. This is a clear example of how they can manage their time and learn on their own. A few years ago, he would have been concerned about suspending the policy, but today

homework is internalized with our staff and it is important to do this now. Teachers need the leverage and freedom to create and make this work.

John Petersen moved to suspend the Homework policy, File: IKB, until school fully reopens. Ginny Kremer seconded the motion.

Amanda Bailey stressed that this policy is also about individuality, not just quantity and quality of homework. Without it in place, she implored the administration to include in the guidance for all staff the need to take into account the accommodations and supports particularly needed by students who receive services.

The Committee **VOTED by roll call** on the motion and it was approved. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Wang NO: Tso)

7.3.2 Budget - Adam Klein (*met on 9/21/20*)

No change was made to the subcommittee's charge. The budget calendar and guidelines were discussed.

7.3.3 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) - *John Petersen*

7.3.3 Spreadsheet from 9/24/20 meeting and Minutes

Minor changes were made to the charter; the ALG will continue to work to consensus. The multiyear ALG model currently assumes that Acton will tax to the levy limit in FY22, there will be little increase in state funding and E&D use will be \$1 million. The Acton portion of the ABRSD assessment is assumed to increase 3.9% while the Minuteman assessment is assumed to increase 31%. The difference between revenues and expenses is a deficit of \$1.2 million. Through the ALG discussions and adjustments to the budget of the operating entities, the FY22 deficit must be reduced to zero.

The Town plans to bond the North Acton Fire Station in March 2021. No significant change in local revenues have occurred. The level of state and federal support for Towns and Schools for FY22 is highly uncertain. In considering the budget process, ALG agreed that the town would be better served by a later town meeting. Jon Benson will be working to set a new date with the Acton Select Board.

The Acton Finance Committee is thinking that town and schools should strive to achieve no tax increase for FY22 and that, in part this should be achieved through the use of reserves. The Fincom would also like to see a new iteration of a cost-reduction committee; both entities thought that the additional burden on personnel would be unwise. Minutes and the ALG charter are available on the Town of Acton DocuShare.

7.3.4 Legislative Liaison - *Ginny Kremer*

Ginny met with our state legislators and reported no new information on funding. There is interest in helping AB fund the gap between Half Day and All Day Kindergarten. There are a couple of bills in the state

legislature to suspend MCAS testing this spring. She will keep the Committee informed.

7.3.5 MASC/MASS Annual Conference – *Diane Baum*

An abbreviated zoom version is being done this year because their bylaws state they have to have an annual assembly and vote on resolutions. A moratorium on MCAS is the first resolution. A delegate to attend the assembly on Nov 7 will be chosen at the meeting on Oct 15.

7.3.6 Building Committee Update - *Peter Light*

FYI: Naming District Facilities Policy FF and Procedures

FYI: Value Management List and Minutes

Value Management was done at the last meeting. A couple of change orders came in under estimate so that helped and some of the design contingency was shifted to the budget, so the gap has been addressed. A finalized price should be available in December. Covid prevented a ground breaking ceremony but a topping off ceremony could be done. The community should start thinking about the building name and signage. Policy FF will govern that process. Marie will act as staff liaison.

8. **Recommendation to Accept \$4,000 Donation from Danny’s Place Youth Services to AB Community Education’s Leader-in-Training Program - VOTE - *Peter Light***

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

**VOTED by roll call:** to accept this generous donation of \$4,000 from Danny’s Place Youth Services to Com Ed’s Leader-in-Training Program with gratitude.

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

9. **Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – *T. McKinley***

John Petersen moved, Adam seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by roll call:** *See motion on warrant memo.*

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

10. **FYI**

9.1. Thank you for “Be Kind” Big Bird Signs from “Acton Celebrates Carroll Spinney”

9.2 Call for Public Comment re Retiring the Colonial as AB’s Official Mascot

9.3 FY21 District Calendar including change to Indigenous Peoples’ Day on 10/12/20

Angie Tso wished all families a Happy Mid-Autumn Festival!

10. **Adjourn**

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

**VOTED by roll call:** to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:01 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda