

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

November 19, 2020

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

7:00 p.m.

To call in: 312 626 6799

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

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

1. Call to Order (7:00)

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 exception of Diane Baum who was absent, ten of the eleven members were participating on the zoom. Per Remote Participation policy, BEDJA, all votes were done by roll call. The meeting was taped by Acton TV.

2. Chairperson's Welcome - Tessa McKinley

3. Public Participation – Please use “Hand Raise” feature to participate (not the “Chat”)
Eight members of the public shared their thoughts regarding the process used to retire the AB mascot. While most were critical of the process (it was rushed, one sided and alienated many community members), several spoke in favor of the Committee’s decision (we have more pressing issues to deal with, and are grateful for the Committee and Leadership’s hard work and thoughtful deliberation). Charlie Kadlec urged both sides to start over so they can understand each other and find common ground. While the students did what they thought was appropriate, he felt that the adults who guided them should have done more to avoid the division that has been created.

4. Superintendent's Update – Peter Light

This was included in Mr. Light’s presentation below.

5. PRESENTATIONS

a. Public Health and Covid-19 Update - Peter Light

Superintendent Light, Nurse Leader Joanne Chadwick R.N., and Assistant Superintendent Dawn Bentley presented on the recent covid cases seen in our schools and considerations about further opening or closing of the buildings. The slides and memo contain a large amount of detailed information, which was very much appreciated by members. In summary, considerations for how open our

schools can be involve physical distancing recommendations, transportation requirements, and expanded access to surveillance testing. The total cases in our schools is now 30.

Questions and comments from the Committee included:

- Is there a tipping point where our staff cannot handle all the contact tracing that needs to be done? Mr. Light: Learning of 4 positive cases today was challenging. The nurses and staff have spent a significant amount of extra time, all depending on when the calls come in. It has averaged 8-10 hours per case.
- With numbers increasing and Thanksgiving next week, why not go all remote? Mr. Light: We want to “keep good data and metrics in front of us” as decisions are made. He will speak with the leadership team tomorrow re the past 72 hours. The transition website has extensive data on our district.
- We want to keep our students and community safe and kids in school. Are there tests or action items that we can require? Mr. Light: No new policies are needed but we “don’t want to be the community police”. We have to impress on everyone to use their good judgment.
- Are we considering the short and long term effects? Can families switch to remote if they see short term effects happening for their children? Mr. Light: Dawn Bentley is working with Emerson Hospital on a survey regarding the effects. Data will be shared when available. Changes to learning programs cannot be made at this time because of staffing limitations and the 6 foot distance requirements. There is a short wait list but there are challenging constraints.
- How are close contacts determined? Mr. Light: Jr High and High School students change classes much more often than elementary students so many more contacts are involved when a positive case is identified. A close contact is someone who has been with an infected person for 20 minutes or more.

Mr. Light concluded that a decision to pause in person learning will not be made using any one metric. The existing challenge is staffing and the number of students in quarantine (previously 248 students, now approximately 350). A pause could be done to try to squash a virus surge, but it would depend on family and student behaviors. March was described as “crisis situation learning” whereas a shut down now, because of all that we have learned, would not disrupt students’ learning. A member of the public stated that the district was being too risk averse and that students should be back in school.

Valerie Gransewicz was thanked for doing an excellent job as Principal of the Remote Learning Program. Mr. Light agreed.

b. Annual 10/1 Enrollment Projections - *Marie Altieri*

Total K-12 Enrollment for 2020-2021 is down 177 students, compared to being down 155 last year. This is a 6% decline over 2 years. Total K-12 Enrollment vs. Projection is down 149 students, or 3%. Kindergarten enrollment for Acton and

Boxborough combined is under projection by 51 students, or 16%. Marie discussed general kindergarten enrollment volatility, on top of families' pandemic concerns. Students who are being homeschooled will be surveyed to see if they plan to return in person. More detail will be discussed as part of the budget process. While the economically disadvantaged students numbers stayed at 11%, not everyone had to complete the form this year so that may not be accurate.

Members discussed how good numbers will be generated for FY22 to make up for this year's irregularities. A member asked for more detailed demographic data. What is provided is the same as in previous years. It was agreed that the DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) work will involve examining issues such as how the Jr High and High School students' school experiences are similar to the general community's (as far as race goes), but the elementary students' experiences do not reflect the community because several of the elementary schools do not have a balanced demographic mix of students.

6. ONGOING BUSINESS

a. **Recommendation to Approve Consent Agenda - VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

Tessa asked for holds on the agenda items. There were none.

- i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 10/29/20 & 11/5/20 – VOTE
- ii. Recommendation to Accept Gift of \$1,000 from Lifetouch Studios to the Junior High School for Student Activities - VOTE
- iii. Recommendation to Accept STEAM Donation in Honor of Don MacKenzie from the Telephone Pioneers of America - VOTE

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

VOTED by roll call: to approve the consent agenda with gratitude.

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

b. **Approval of Superintendent Light's Successor Contract – VOTE - Tessa McKinley**

Tessa explained that because Mr. Light did not have superintendent experience when he was hired, his starting salary was relatively low. Over the past 3 years, he has "proved his worth to us and other districts" and using comparable salary data, the proposed five year contract included FY22 salary of \$228,000. The contract was described as "clean" with everything included in the salary.

Amy Krishnamurthy enthusiastically moved to approve the successor contract for Superintendent Peter Light as proposed. Ginny Kremer seconded the motion.

Members unanimously praised Mr. Light's performance. Comments included:

- Peter has done amazing work, particularly through the covid pandemic with the lack of federal and state guidance/leadership.
- Peter approaches the job as a general manager. He doesn't try to be an expert in everything. He uses his team resources well.
- He has an expansive view of what it means to be an educator and embraces all of it. "Do what you're interested in and try it."

- Peter’s excellent communication skills, compassion and transparency have been key this year. He is a great listener.
- He is a consummate professional.
- He is the superintendent for everyone in our diverse community, no matter what group. His efforts are very much appreciated.
- Offering to not take his raise last year, when money was tight, was a true testament of leadership.

Mr. Light appreciated the compliments, noting that the work is also done by many people behind the scenes. He has been struck by the quality of people in the community and is very grateful and happy to commit to working with everyone for 5 more years.

The Committee unanimously **VOTED by roll call** to approve Mr. Light’s successor contract “with lots of gratitude”. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

c. **Budget Update - Dave Verdolino**

i. FY22 Budget Timeline - **VOTE** - Adam Klein

The proposed revision to the timeline brings it in line with Boxborough’s Town Meeting plans.

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

VOTED by roll call: to approve the FY22 Budget Timeline as presented. (YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

d. **Review of Open Meeting Law Complaint - Peter Light**

i. Recommendation to Authorize District Counsel to Investigate and Respond for the ABRSC – **VOTE**

Mr. Light explained that a complaint was filed by a member of the community regarding the mascot decision made at the School Committee meeting on 10/15/20. Counsel has been consulted and it is recommended that the Committee vote to refer the matter to her to investigate and then get back to the School Committee with a response and, if necessary, a recommendation for possible remedies. A response is due by December 4th.

Mr. Light suggested that the Committee authorize District Counsel to investigate and respond for the School Committee and if any actions are necessary, she will recommend them. Amy Krishnamurthy made the motion and it was seconded by Nora Shine.

In response to a question, Mr. Light thought this legal advice, depending on what is learned, would cost the district under \$1,000. (2-4 hours of counsel’s time x \$200 per hour). He recommends a thorough process, such as what counsel would do – fact finding, followed by remedy if needed.

The Committee unanimously **VOTED by roll call** to support the motion.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

7. Subcommittee and Member Reports

- i. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) - *Tessa McKinley*
- ii. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – Amy Krishnamurthy
They met that morning and are reviewing the FY21 budget by quarters.
- iii. MASC Annual Meeting 11/7/20 - *Amy Krishnamurthy*
Resolutions were voted and all passed at the conference.
- iv. EDCO Update - *Peter Light*
The Executive Director has resigned and been replaced by Cindy Taymore. EDCO is in major transition with extraordinary financial challenges. Mr. Light is on the executive finance committee now.
- v. Other
Ginny Kremer met with Rep Tami Gouveia re covid assistance and the increasing frustration. It was suggested that the School Committee could send a letter to the state demanding that a timely budget schedule be confirmed because it creates great difficulty for communities.
Nora Shine and Kyra Cook attended the EDCO Roundtable.
Amy Krishnamurthy reported that the Acton FinCom is working on their Point of View document.
Kyra Cook reported that the DEI Committee is meeting and has cochairs.
Evelyn Abayaah-Issah reported that the new ABRHS Parents of Color Advisory Group just met and 50 parents attended. Great representation from all ethnic groups was reported. She is leading this group with Counselor Lindsay Rosenman.

8. Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – T McKinley

Tessa McKinley moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: see motion on memo

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

9. FYI

10. Adjourn

At 10:12 p.m. Adam Klein moved, Evelyn Abayaah-Issah seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the ABRSC

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

NEXT MEETINGS: December 3 at 7:00 p.m. via zoom