

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

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

To call in: 312 626 6799

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

December 17, 2020

7:00 p.m. Open Meeting

9:15 p.m. Executive Session

---

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang  
Members Absent: Ginny Kremer  
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 noted that the meeting was being conducted remotely via a Zoom webinar with ten of the eleven committee members participating by zoom: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang and herself. Ginny Kremer 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 welcomed the new High School Student Rep sophomore Rhik Mazumder. Rhik looks forward to sharing his and his peers' thoughts with the Committee.

**b. Public Participation –**

Martin Benson spoke again regarding what he believes was a coordinated effort to retire the mascot. He asked the Committee to vacate their decision. Andrew Ruggiero also spoke against the decision which he felt was rife with conflicts of interest and made without all voices heard. David Crocker has been distributing yard signs in support of keeping the mascot. He feels that students have been misguided and the Colonial legacy is being forgotten. Scott Smyers asked that MCAS testing not be done this year and hopes it will be on a future agenda. Regarding the mascot, he asked that the Naming policy be fully addressed.

Charlie Kadlec asked people to consider the quote by Martin Luther King, "I look forward to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." He felt that the colonial, as depicted by various representations including the mascot, is being judged by the color of his skin, while the content of his character is very similar to that of the students who are

deposing the mascot. In his opinion, it is not about what the mascot looks like, but what the colonials did with their lives. He requested that the School Committee rescind their vote and start over to try to heal the divisiveness that has been created.

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

The District continues to be in the yellow category in Acton and green in Boxborough regarding covid. We are seeing some increases in High School students again and are watching closely. Mr. Light announced that David Krane, Principal of the McCarthy-Towne School for 11 years has decided to retire. Information will be sent out regarding the upcoming search process. Marie Altieri reported that the search for a replacement for High School Principal Larry Dorey (also retiring) has begun. Twenty two people are on the search committee and at this time, 24 applications have been received. NESDEC has been hired to help us recruit through the second week of January. Interviews will be done at the end of January. Finalists should be identified by the beginning of February and an appointment is expected by February vacation. A third search process will be done to replace our current Interim Director of Special Education. We have also contracted with NESDEC for that search. We are planning to run hockey and basketball this winter based on covid data for those sports from last fall. The first snow remote learning day was today. Not everyone was happy about it. Families are being surveyed tomorrow and there will be a question on this.

2. **PRESENTATIONS**

a. **K-6 Structured Literacy - Reading - Dr. Deborah Bookis, Sharon Ryan, Dora Sanchez, Debbie Dixon, Dr. Joanna Christodoulou**

The Committee was updated on the district's progress regarding early literacy work this past year, including efforts to identify and support students with dyslexia. This was a follow up regarding unfinished work from FY20 that was postponed due to the pandemic.

Committee Questions and Comments included:

- What data will be lost if the early bird screener is a pilot? Because we are the single beta test site, we are helping them make the final tweaks on the app and anticipate that we will continue with it for the long run.
- It is fantastic that we are helping to put this research into practice. The social emotional impact of early reading skills and how the kids think of themselves as learners should be highlighted. Young students' confidence and not "waiting for them to fail" is key.
- How confident are we that the iready assessment is a tool we can use 5-6 years from now as students grow up? That is how we will know if it's been successful. It has been administered for grades 1-8. The assessment breaks down the components so we can pinpoint where a student might be struggling and it identifies with the standards. Our principals are finding it a really helpful tool.

- Will all students benefit from this? Yes, it will impact all of them, because it looks at all of the areas that need to come together for a student to be a good reader and what interventions might be needed. Progress is also monitored.
- Given that 10-15% of students suffer from dyslexia, this is an important approach. On the other hand, we need to identify who needs more support, and what are the consequences of those decisions? Because it involves a sequence of assessments, this could be subjective. It was explained that this is an attempt to identify students' needs early to prevent harm as they get older. Understanding the needs leads to figuring out how to fill in the gaps for a child. Early assessment uses a screen with a wide net, asking if some children are at risk for challenges. A main benefit of diagnosis is getting special education services. This prevents kids from having to wait until they are struggling to have their issues addressed.
- It will be important to inform families what this assessment and screening means, and what will happen when children are identified. Parents need to understand what will be happening. Amanda Bailey from the Special Education Parent Advisory Council agreed.
- Educators will have to reconsider why and how to use all of their tools in potentially different ways, including benchmark assessments.

Several members were “thrilled” at the direction that this area is heading. One stated that embedding this approach in general education is a “new day for teaching kids to read”. Deborah Bookis and her team were thanked for a very informative presentation.

-----  
 At approximately 8:45 p.m. Mr. Light interrupted the meeting to apologize for a large number of highly offensive racial comments that had been submitted anonymously through the zoom question/answer feature. Although the comments were only visible to members of the committee who had opened and were looking at the question/answer feature, they were extremely upsetting, particularly because they specifically targeted the committee’s two Black members, Evelyn Abayaah Issah and Kyra Cook. It was noted that this was a very clear example that racism does exist in our community.

The Committee took a 5 minute break at 8:51 p.m.

When the meeting resumed, and with over 120 public participants still on the webinar, two members of the public asked to speak. Charlie Kadlec and Andrew Ruggiero expressed their disgust at what had just happened. Mr. Light apologized again and assured the public that the Committee would follow up on the zoom bombing and continue the discussion at a future meeting.

**b. New: DESE Regulations for Structured Learning Time - Peter Light**

Mr. Light explained DESE’s new learning time regulations that were proposed on December 9<sup>th</sup> and adopted on December 15<sup>th</sup>. The expectation is that they be implemented by January 19<sup>th</sup>. For AB’s hybrid model, 35 hours of “live

instruction” would now be required (we currently do 30.5). Remote models would require 40 hours of “synchronous” instruction for students over a 10 day period.

The committee agreed that surveying our stakeholders (students, families, educators) about their current experiences and preferences is important. The survey will end on 12/22 so analysis could be done by 1/7 in time to request a waiver by 1/11. Several members said they would vote for the waiver whole heartedly if we think our current program is the best. There was a discussion of how to make student check-ins meaningful. More zoom time does not mean better engagement. There should be specific interventions for those who need it and not just increasing learning time. There should be concern about students’ mental health (more to come on that at the February meeting). The timing for this change is bad and there is no funding provided for it.

Mr. Light agreed with the Committee’s comments and has talked with the ABEA and shared his concerns with the DESE leadership. Several members of the public spoke in general support of the Committee’s reactions. Corinne Hogseth advocated for bringing more students back into the classrooms, particularly given that there has been no in-school transmission at AB at this time. Mr. Light responded that he and the leadership have that conversation with the public health officials weekly. As we start to firm up vaccines for educators and come down off the surge, he hopes that there might be the opportunity to start thinking about this, but not yet.

### 3. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **FY22 School Calendar** - First Read – *Postponed to the next meeting due to time*

### 4. ONGOING BUSINESS

- a. **Consent Agenda - VOTE** - *Tessa McKinley*
  - i. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 12/3/20 – **VOTE**
  - ii. Approval of \$10,000 Covid-19 Emergency Grant from the AB United Way to the Community Education Extended Day Program - **VOTE**
  - iii. Approval of Donation from Littleton Electric Light and Water Department to the Blanchard Memorial School for technology equipment – **VOTE**

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

- b. **ABRSC FY21 Operating Protocols - VOTE** – *Postponed to the next meeting.*
- c. **Superintendent Goals 2020-2021** - Second Read - **VOTE** – *Postponed*
- d. **Budget Update** - *Dave Verdolino*
- e. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**
  - i. Budget - *Adam Klein reported.*

ii. Capital Improvement – *Yebin Wang reported.*

As the open meeting was nearing the end, Emily Richmond spoke as a citizen who watched what had happened and was “appalled”. She asked members to stand up and make a statement against what happened to Kyra and Evelyn. Many members shared their anger again with one reminding everyone that this was not the only racial threat received by these women, but a repeated constant struggle that they have faced. For all the pain this event has caused, if everyone can redouble their efforts to address, it could be a significant moment. Evelyn and Kyra were asked to continue on the committee, and “stay with your voice”.

Tessa McKinley agreed. She felt that some of the racist tendencies being expressed were brought up by the mascot decision. No one can know what Evelyn and Kyra experience, but people can stand in support with them. Members will not stand for this racism anymore and will push for policies to address it. Kyra Cook added that it is an honor to make history with Evelyn on the Committee. Kyra is the first Black person elected in Acton’s history. She is grateful to be participating, and it is hard but powerful to be first. She is “not afraid and won’t go away”.

Tessa concluded that, “this is really hard for all of us but not because of our skin color. It is even harder for Evelyn and Kyra.” She really appreciates working with them and is honored to sit on the Committee with them.

- f. **Statement of Warrants & Recommendation to Approve – VOTE – T McKinley**  
Adam Klein moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED by roll call:** see motion on memo  
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)
- g. FYI

**5. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 10:21 p.m., Tessa stated that there was need for an executive session and she Would entertain a motion “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. The Committee would not return to open session.”

Kyra Cook moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED by roll call:** to enter executive session for the reason Tessa stated.  
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso, Wang)

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda