

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

Virtual Public Zoom Webinar Meeting

Wed, December 23, 2020

To attend open meeting: <https://abschools.zoom.us/j/99558745909>

4:00 p.m.

To call in: 1 646 558 8656 Webinar ID: 995 5874 5909

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

Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso

Members Absent: Yebin Wang

Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr

1. Call to Order

The ABRSC was called to order at 4:02 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. Yebin Wang 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. Discussion of Incident that Took Place at the School Committee Meeting on 12/17/2020

Noting that because this was not a regularly scheduled meeting, public participation would not be held, Tessa read the attached Opening Statement.

Each of the ten Committee members shared a statement. Superintendent Peter Light, Deputy Superintendent Marie Altieri, Assistant Superintendent Deborah Bookis and Assistant Superintendent Dawn Bentley also shared their thoughts.

3. Development of School Committee Statement - VOTE - Tessa McKinley

Comments made during this lengthy discussion included:

- "No significant growth can happen without significant relationships" was cited as why it is critical that both sides of this issue come together and "see each other". Members agreed.
- Some of the most polarizing discourse is on both sides.
- There is a lot to celebrate about the founding of Acton and Boxborough. We need to be sure that is communicated.
- Reference to the mascot decision should be left out of the statement because this issue is bigger than the mascot.
- We should acknowledge that racism exists and that we want to do things differently.
- How can we live as neighbors with mutual respect?

John Petersen moved that **the ABRSC endorse the statement**. Adam Klein seconded, adding "with gratitude and love to my community".

The Committee **VOTED the motion by roll** call and it was unanimously approved.
(YES: Abayaah-Issah, Baum, Cook, Klein, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

Tessa was thanked for calling the urgent meeting. Evelyn and Kyra were thanked for being part of the committee. It was noted that Yebin (who was absent) stated that he supported creating a statement like this from the Committee. Beth will post it to the website and send it to the Select Boards and Finance Committees of both towns. It was suggested that this be done right away, as well as after the holidays.

4. **Adjourn**

At 6:27 p.m. Kyra Cook moved, Nora Shine seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: to adjourn the ABRSC.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

Agenda, Draft ABRSC Statement for discussion from Tessa McKinley, Statements from Members

Chairperson Tessa McKinley's Opening Statement

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting 12/23/2020

Welcome everyone to this special meeting that we have called. I want to say a few words about the purpose of the meeting tonight and to remark on the absence of public participation.

What happened last Thursday night was vulgar and inexcusable. It was a direct attack on the two black women on our committee. Our community is continually faced with the need to denounce racism but it's time that our committee go beyond condemnation and apology. The work to heal from this incident, as well as the countless others that have occurred in recent years, needs to be done not just by our committee but our community as a whole.

As I reflect on my own reaction to the incident and my responsibility to my colleagues and our community, I think back to one of the most powerful concepts gleaned from my SEED training: I don't know what I don't know. I need to listen and learn from the voices that represent different experiences from my own. My reading of Ibram X. Kendi's book has taught me that I am a part of our racist society. It has also taught me that I am in the privileged position of being elected to make policy. Kendi states clearly that "Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups." He goes on to say that "We all have the power to discriminate. Only an exclusive few have the power to make policy." I recognize my power and pledge to use my position to further our school district and our community in their anti-racist journey.

Since the incident, the outpouring of support from across our communities, our region, and our district has been heartening. Some people, however, have centered the conversation on themselves so I have decided to center Evelyn and Kyra's voices at this meeting. They were verbally attacked, they have been wronged, and their voices should guide the rebuilding of our committee as well as our actions going forward. I know that there are many individuals and groups who would like to voice their support for Evelyn and Kyra and to denounce racism. There will be time to voice those wishes. However, in an effort to minimize any additional trauma, I have decided that we will not entertain public comment at this meeting because Evelyn and Kyra's voices as well as their needs must remain the focus. We deeply value public participation and our communities have a rich tradition of participation in local government but tonight is about Evelyn and Kyra's experiences and the healing our committee needs to do in order to move our important work forward. Public participation will resume at our January meeting and in the meantime, comments can always be directed to abrsc@abschools.org.

Members will have an opportunity to make their own statements this evening and my hope is that we can vote on a joint statement regarding our response and our plans moving forward. As we listen to each other tonight, I'd like to remind everyone of some of the ground rules we used in our SEED training. In responding to each other, I hope you'll consider the intent versus the impact of your words. We began this work this summer in order to have these difficult conversations and we are all still learning. I will now allow members to share their statements if they desire.



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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December 23, 2020

We, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee, condemn racism in all its forms. We acknowledge that there is racism in our schools and community. We must move away from being innocent bystanders and dedicate ourselves to being active participants in anti-racist work. We are a committee of individuals, imperfect and vulnerable, with a diversity of beliefs and experiences. Yet we must work as one in service to our fellow neighbors and to all of our children.

As we approach our work, we will be guided by the idea that we can no longer simply be tolerant. We will not tolerate with stoic silence, a culture of erasure, shaming, harassment, or intimidation. Mere kindness, acceptance, and tolerance are no longer the standard for the type of community our students deserve. We must actively participate in the transformation of our towns in collaboration with our dynamic student community and the families that entrust us with their education. We must engage in the work to be an anti-racist community and understand that this transformation should be considerate and empathetic of the diversity of lived perspectives that make up our communities. This work will be neither easy, nor swift, nor without discomfort and requires multi-sided dialogue.

We commit to establishing policies that support anti-racist work; crafting budgets that improve educational equity for all students; and working hand-in-hand with the administration to be accountable for taking brave and bold actions that challenge our existing structures and systems. Therefore, we charge the educators and school leaders across our district to infuse these tenets and principles into their schools and classrooms. We recognize the dynamic nature of our student body and the interconnected, multifaceted world they will enter after they leave our campuses. We invite our students to help us build an inclusive and loving community, recognizing that this is a uniquely valuable aspect of the A-B education. We strive to better serve our increasingly diverse student body and community.

We renew our steadfast commitment to the students of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District and their families, and reaffirm that we seek to serve them to the best of our ability.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee
Tessa McKinley, Chairperson

Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Diane Baum, Kyra Cook, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso, Yebin Wang

To develop engaged, well-balanced learners through collaborative, caring relationships.