

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Approved Minutes

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School
16 Charter Road, Acton, MA

January 10, 2019
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Mary Brolin, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin (7:06 p.m.), Paul Murphy, Angie Tso, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Adam Klein
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Diane Baum.
2. **Chairman's Introduction – Diane Baum**
The Chairperson asked members whose terms are expiring if they knew their plans for the future. Mary Brolin announced that she will not be running again. Ginny Kremer intends to run again. Eileen Zhang has not decided yet. Diane encouraged new members to consider running. The March 21st School Committee meeting will be held in the Administration Building Auditorium. The Committee will decide whether to hold future meetings there.
3. **Public Participation - none**
Per policy BEDH, members of the public may speak for up to 2 minutes on items not included on this agenda. Comments regarding items on the agenda should be made during that part of the meeting. Typically, the Committee/Administration will not respond to comments during public participation.
4. **Student Representatives' Update – Michael Cheng**
Term 2 ended yesterday. It is a stressful time studying for midyears. Many students are thinking about the schedule changes that the Committee heard about in November. The day will go from 8 periods to 6 with a shortened lunch. An online petition has collected 1000 signatures although there was a lot of confusion. A main area of concern was the shortened lunch period of 44 minutes.
5. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes– Diane Baum**
 - 5.1. Meeting Minutes of Dec 13, 2018
Diane Baum read the warrants and the Committee signed the documents.
Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and the minutes of December 13, 2018 were unanimously approved as written.
6. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light**
 - 6.1. Appointment of Mr. Larry Dorey as ABRHS Principal
Superintendent Light reviewed the update that he brought to the meeting. Larry Dorey was appointed permanent Principal of ABRHS. At the next meeting, the School Committee will be asked to vote to consolidate the Douglas and Gates buildings, keeping their programs separate. The Superintendent has completed the first phase of his entry process.

7. **FY20 Superintendent's Preliminary Budget** – *Peter Light*

7.1. Budget Overview including Line Item Detail – *Dave Verdolino*

Superintendent Light introduced the budget and said that the most important part of this presentation will be the input and questions from the Committee. The School Committee priorities need to be reflected in the budget and questions need to be captured so they can be answered at Budget Saturday (1/26/19). Dave Verdolino presented the changes since the Dec 10th meeting from the Preliminary Budget to the Recommended Budget.

The Recommended Gross Operating Budget is proposed at \$90,982,111 for a 2.55% increase. Three categories of changes have been made (see slide 3).

Dave discussed what happens to the assessments. These numbers have been shared with both towns and have been well received. This is the last significant year for the cost shift to Boxborough paying more than based on enrollment, as outlined in the Regional Agreement. Slide 6 is the plan for Budget Saturday, although some numbers could change. It was clarified that two additional school buses were being requested. The process of adding a line item to the budget was discussed briefly. Many programs and requests compete for being included. The Superintendent used the addition of the “World of Difference” program as an example of how something new was added. As he was coming into the district, there were concerns around bias issues. The administration looked at all of the things being done in that area, and realized that they did not have an activity for kids. He explained how the Leadership team went about choosing the World of Difference and now it is being used in our High School to address the identified need.

7.2. Transportation Update and Budget – *JD Head, Nicole Rogers - GPI (Greenman-Pedersen Inc)*

Overall our transportation system's efficiency has been great, although the beginning of this school year was a big change due to our new start times. The Committee discussed the target and maximum times used and how it relates to costs. Ten additional buses would be needed to get to a 35 minute target time. Currently, we are achieving 45 minutes. Mr Light outlined the various approaches that were taken to address concerns this fall. Initially they started with global targets, but as families were adjusting to the new drive times, the Administration heard about issues. One approach was to use a 35 minute target and the second was to separate the Conant, McT, and Merriam routes because students were often arriving late due to the number of buses and students. Getting students safely to school on time is the priority.

Paul Murphy thanked Nicole Rogers for presenting data, not just anecdotes, emphasizing that it gives an important perspective. The targets of 66% and 88% were decided based on the industry standard capacity utilization of 55 high school students and 65 elementary students per bus. Mary Brolin stated that if the Committee wants to reduce drive time beyond a 45 minute ride, they need to have a serious discussion about School Choice because that is creating some of the long bus rides. Adding two buses is fine for next year, but more discussion is needed after that, in her opinion. Angie Tso asked about how traffic impacts the numbers. Nicole explained that the plans incorporate traffic issues.

The longest ride time is 47 minutes and there are only 2 beyond the 45 by adding two buses. Peter thanked JD and Nicole for their hard work, especially in the beginning of the year because this data shows how efficient our system is.

7.3. Revolving Accounts Updates:

7.3.1. Athletics - *Steve Martin*

Participation numbers are up for the first time since Steve has been here. Automatic waivers are now given to students on the Free/Reduced Lunch list. Steve explained how fees have changed given donated gym space and no set up for girls' gymnastics. He thanked the Committee for providing assistant coaches and is requesting that they fulfill the last part of that agreement in the FY20 budget. The Committee enjoyed hearing Steve's proposal to add Esports and Fencing as two new High School teams. He noted that Esports is a great way to socialize for some of our kids. Peter thanked Steve for being such a wonderfully creative Athletic Director. No fee increase is being proposed.

7.3.2. Food Services - *Kirsten Nelson*

Kirsten outlined the difference between the Free and Reduced Lunch list compared to the Economically Disadvantaged list which have made it easier to provide assistance to children who need it for meals. Her new initiatives include recycling and composting currently at 7 of the 8 schools. Her new Local Sustainable Fish lunch program has been a huge success.

A member and her child really appreciated all the vegetarian options in the cafeteria. Students who have any kind of special dietary needs are encouraged to meet with Kirsten and/or her staff to discuss how they can help and review her book of food options. A member felt that at Blanchard, the food options don't really reflect the cultures of the students. Kirsten is working on adding new items like this although she has several new cafeteria managers this year and is careful about having too many changes during transitions like this. To see what ingredients are in food items, students must look in each cafeteria's book. Kirsten is working to introduce interactive menus, including ingredients lists.

7.3.3. All Day Kindergarten (ADK) - *Marie Altieri*

Marie reported that the Administration plans to keep the \$4500 fee unchanged for next year and they expect same number of students and sections, although one section will move from Blanchard to Douglas. Over the next 6-9 months, the Administration will study and consider whether to make a recommendation about universal Kindergarten or not. It would be an expensive undertaking to go to full universal Kindergarten with no fee, costing an estimated \$1.2 million. Diane Baum noted that if we had universal ADK, the reimbursement is only \$30/student. Paul Murphy does not want to lose the option of ½ day for those families that want it.

7.4. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Update – *Paul Murphy*

7.4.1. Materials from meeting on Jan 3, 2019 (next meeting is Jan 17)

7.4.2. Approved minutes of meeting on Dec 13, 2018

7.4.3. BOS/FinCom Budget Saturday Meeting Agenda - Jan 5, 2019

Paul Murphy reported that there was a \$750,000 deficit on the Acton side. \$250,000 has now been saved and the Selectmen are looking for what they can do to close the gap by perhaps using reserves. Kudos to the Budget Subcommittee for their work.

7.5. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Update – *Tessa McKinley, Mary Brolin*

7.5.1. FY20 Operating Budget Review Meeting Agenda - Jan 5, 2019

Peter Light presented the region's budget and it was very well received. Boxborough has two big zoning questions for their upcoming Annual Town Meeting. The Meeting could be 3 or more nights this spring.

7.6. ABRSC FY20 Budget Saturday Meeting Agenda - Jan 26, 2019

The Superintendent hopes to tell a story by using panels arranged by the district goals, hence the agenda's structure. This will make it obvious why requests are important and what they relate to. It was noted that rich discussions happened right after each panel last year, and not so much at the end of the day.

7.7. School Committee Budget Feedback and Questions

The language in the Regional Agreement says the budget vote must be taken twice - a preliminary vote and a final vote with deadlines. That is why a preliminary budget vote is done on Budget Saturday and a final vote at, or just after, the Budget Hearing in February.

Michael Bo questioned if 2 or 3 additional buses would achieve improvement of the transportation situation. He suggested more time should be spent analyzing the data to see what is really needed to meet the families' needs. This might end up being a 3 or 5 year plan. The Superintendent explained that the Administration's goal was to implement the School Committee's guidelines of a 45 minute ride time. If the School Committee wants to change those guidelines, he would respond, but Mr. Light would want to know it was the will of the School Committee to do that. Michael stated that without a plan to address the issues, he cannot support the request as proposed.

The Committee discussed the goal of 45 minutes and acceptable error around it, as well as the first steps that could be taken to improve the situation, as proposed. It is currently an efficiently run system. The Superintendent reiterated that the goal is to add 2 buses to have the kids arrive at Conant, McT and Merriam on time for school. A small change to start time might also be warranted.

Diane Baum asked the Committee if they were ok with the current policy of 45 minutes, or if they wanted to discuss it. There was agreement not to change the 45 minutes. A member added that parents should take the bus ride length into consideration when choosing a school if it matters to their family. Michael Bo concluded that if the families who had major concerns and issues this year have had them appropriately addressed, and adding the two buses will help, then he is fine with that decision.

Diane stated that the School Committee's purview is to set priorities. She heard that the 45 minute target will stay in place and that ridership is based on the GPS study. Any concerns or questions about getting to/from home should be addressed via the Parent Communication Map, as far as whom to speak with. Peter summarized that there were 3 issues that had come up; the duration of the bus rides, the number of students on buses, and safety of some bus stops. The Administration is working with those families whose concerns were brought up this winter.

Angie Tso asked for more information about the technology upgrade at the High School on Budget Saturday as well as about building security. She was also interested in clean water and recycling in our schools.

Mary Brolin concluded that "this is a great budget". Much is being achieved with an increase of less than 2 1/2 % and it has been well received in both towns.

John Petersen spoke from the audience referring to the Superintendent's comment about the balance point between cost and benefit. In the case of buses, you can predict how/when students will ride the bus. You can either pay for that or not but should base the decision on the data. He encouraged people to ask the hard questions about what is the right value.

8. **ClearGov Data Benchmarking Comparisons Demo** – *Dave Verdolino*
https://www.abschools.org/news/what_s_new/compare_a_b_r_s_d_to_other_school_districts

9. **School Building Project Update** – *Mary Brolin*

9.1. Building Committee meeting on Jan 9 - Site Selection Decision

(extensive materials are posted on the Building Committee website at

https://www.abschools.org/district/superintendent_s_office/school_capital_space_planning)

9.2 Draft Minutes of the Building Committee meeting on Dec 12, 2018

10. **FY19 School Committee Meeting Calendar** – *Diane Baum*

10.1. FY20 Budget Hearing move from Feb 13th to Feb 7th meeting?

This would give a week to make adjustments if needed after Budget Saturday. There were no objections to this change.

10.2. Combine June 6th and June 20th meetings into one meeting on June 13th?

This would avoid meeting close to the last day of school. There were no objections.

10.3. FY20 School Committee Workshop Options

10.3.1. Possibly June 26/27, 2019?

Diane asked the Committee if a March workshop would be valuable to discuss the Superintendent's entry plan findings more in depth. This would be a public meeting with one agenda item, in addition to the 2 scheduled meetings. There were no objections.

Diane also asked the Committee if a Summer overnight workshop in June regarding the SEED program would be valuable. This is one of our district goals. It is a 15 hour training program and could be held at the Wylie Center in Beverly. This would be a commitment to team development to inform future decisionmaking.

Members have heard great things about the training, although it would be hard to commit to a 2-day overnight. A member said that for her, the hardest thing on School Committee is that members feel you have to know everything. She felt that professional development like this adds a lot to the experience of being a Committee member. Diane will move forward with pursuing this and confirming members' availability.

10.4. FY20 Summer ABRSC Business Meeting – Thurs, August 22, 2019 at 7 p.m.

Three Committee members cannot attend on this date so a new one will be found.

11. **Recommendation to Approve Donations from the Friends of the Acton Libraries to the ABRSD Libraries** – **VOTE** – *Peter Light*

It was noted that this is a very significant annual donation from the Friends organization. The Committee expressed appreciation for the work done by the volunteers to bring these resources to the students.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the donations from the Friends of the Acton Libraries.

12. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

12.1. Policy – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

12.1.1. **Student School Bus Behavior Expectations**, File: JICC/EEAEC – Second Read – **VOTE**

Diane Baum sent some comments that were included in the draft.

Paul Murphy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the revised policy as proposed.

12.1.2. Staff Recruitment, Selection and Appointment, File: GCE – First Read

Marie explained that the goal was to be clearer, including the title, updated language on qualifications and positions that it applied to. Family members were also defined per the Ethics laws. Feedback may be sent to Amy and Beth prior to the second reading.

12.2. Capital Improvement – meeting on Dec 12 –

The subcommittee met last night. Peter reported that a draft of the Capital Plan was received from SKANSKA and they are reviewing it. JD Head, Dave Verdolino, Marie Altieri and Peter Light will bring the material to Budget Saturday. \$23 million is the total of the work. An SOI could be submitted to the MSBA re the Accelerated Repair Program. This is a strategy to explore. It is anticipated that a Blanchard SOI will come to School Committee at the Feb 7 meeting so they could then go to MSBA. There will be some big decisions about Conant in the future. We will submit an SOI annually for Conant.

12.3. Budget –meeting on Jan 3 - Amy Krishnamurthy (see discussion above)

12.4. SEPAC -Paul Murphy reported there has been communication between the SEPAC and the District about hiring.

12.5. PTO Chairs Roundtable - Tessa McKinley reported that they had met, but there was no new information.

12.6. Acton Board of Selectmen – Paul Murphy reported a discussion about how the tax basis is allocated – residential vs commercial and members agreed to stay based on residential. Janet Adachi is not running again.

12.7. Others

13. FYI

13.1. Acton and Boxborough 2019 Election Calendars

13.2. 2019-2020 ABRSD School Calendar, voted 12/13/18

13.3. Thank you to Lueders Environmental, Inc. for their donation to the ABRSD

13.4. This Month in the Division of Open Government

The ABRSC was adjourned at 9:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

Next Meetings:

- ABRSC Budget Saturday, January 26, 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library (materials posted on Jan 18)
- ABRSC Meeting, February 7, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library (materials posted on Feb 1)