

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (Approved 2/26/15)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

January 8, 2015
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Mary Emmons, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr, Auditor Tim Harrison from Borgatti Harrison & Co.

Chairwoman Kristina Rychlik called the ABRSC to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. **Chairman’s Introduction**

2. **Statement of Warrant and Approval of Minutes**

- 2.1. The minutes of the School Committee meeting on 12/18/14 were approved.
- 2.2. ABRSD Warrant #15-013 dated 12/24/14 in the amount of \$3,508,847.30 and #15-014 dated 1/8/15 in the amount of \$2,824,154.35 were signed by the School Committee.

3. **Public Participation - none**

4. **Presentation of Independent Auditor Reports by Borgatti Harrison & Co. – VOTE**

Clare Jeannotte and Auditor Tim Harrison presented.

- 4.1. ABRSD Basic Financial Statements for Year Ending 6/30/14 (Draft) – Clare stated that the majority of time is spent reviewing this document. Pages 1 and 2 are the auditors’ statements. Clare takes responsibility for the rest of the information in the report. One of most useful pages is 17, Budget to Actual – General Fund for FY14 showing a net positive balance of \$113,147.
- 4.2. ABRSD Management Letter for Year Ending 6/30/14 – These are suggestions that come out of the audit. Nothing significant. It was suggested that Clare look into some of the checks and balances that have been overlooked with all of the change in personnel. Tim said it is nothing to be worried about, but something to stay on top of.
- 4.3. ABRSD OMB Circular A-133 – Reviews internal controls of the District.
- 4.4. ABRSD Student Activity Funds for Year Ending 6/30/14 – Junior High and High School funds are each audited. With the new region, there will some funds this year for the elementary schools.
- 4.5. ABRSD Independent Auditors’ Reports for Year Ending 6/30/14 – The District submits these to the DESE every year.

The Committee discussed the E and D number on page 13 of \$688,695. Tim explained that \$1.2 million is being used for E and D.

Mary Brolin moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the Independent Auditors’ reports as presented.

Glenn Brand thanked Clare for suggesting that this presentation be provided to the Committee.

5. **FY16 Budget Presentation #2**

Glenn Brand stated that, unfortunately, this proposed preliminary budget does not provide for program growth or new innovation. It does not really “move the district forward”, but it provides what is needed to open the doors for students in September. Funding sources are declining 4.21% while the preliminary budget is rising 5.25% when compared to FY15. There is also concern because some of the numbers are not confirmed yet so assumptions are being made. This FY16 preliminary assessment for Acton would be an 8.0% increase and for Boxborough, it would be a 6.7% increase.

Questions from the Committee:

Brigid Bieber asked about the trend between the assessment numbers for Acton compared to Boxborough. She noted the dramatic swing. She stated that while it is important to have a statement about what the Committee feels is needed educationally to move forward, the numbers “have to come down”. She noted that the Budget Subcommittee meets next Wednesday and that will be helpful to provide more direction to the Administration.

Paul looks forward to the detail coming up in future meetings. He hopes to see support for the issues in special education students’ MCAS performance highlighted at previous meetings. Glenn Brand stated that the allocation of resources are not in response to any one thing but rather a consideration of caseload numbers and a commitment to further improve programming for students. There is a strong desire to try and improve services by striving for a model of three special education teachers in each elementary school. Mike Coppolino agreed with Brigid’s comment.

Mary Brolin asked for clarification of slide 11 about Gates +.6, and -1.0 should be added to Blanchard. Douglas should show +1. She asked about how the handling of capital outlay is decided, whether it should be in the budget or outside. She asked if the proposed Capital Study could be done outside the budget. Glenn stated that there has been some discussion of this, including how to handle OPEB. Currently, it is included in the base budget but it could be discussed.

Maria Neyland stated that during the Regionalization discussions, there was talk about trying to bring some special education programs into the District, where appropriate, to save money. She asked if any of this had been done yet. Mary Emmons stated that there is nothing specific in this budget but there may be some students returning to the High School. It has not been reflected yet, but it is always something they are thinking about. Maria agrees that the numbers need to be tightened up. She feels like every year funding is being reallocated to pupil services, and emphasized that the Committee needs to make sure that they are addressing all students’ needs throughout the district.

Mike Coppolino agreed with Maria, saying that during regionalization discussions, it was clear that Blanchard would provide some resources for more efficient special education programs and save money. He stated that Assistant Principals and more English teachers have been added over the years which help all students but he expressed concern about the increase in special education needs as well. Mary Brolin agreed but noted that there is a 40% increase in the OPEB line, stressing that it is hard to think of the needs of all students and meet all of these new liability requirements as well.

Dennis Bruce thanked the Administration for putting all of the budget numbers on the table and the transparency that that provided. He requested several things for future budget discussions. This included: 1. What does the projected drop in enrollment and resources mean to the JH and HS. Marie Altieri noted that part of this answer is enrollment and the shift of students from Boxborough to Acton but it also involves the split of savings from regionalization that changes year to year. 2. Regarding the decrease in staff of 2FTES and one custodian – he asked about what is above the funding line and below it. 3. He asked about the percentage increase for CASE and bus monitors, and

why. 4. For Budget Saturday, Dennis asked that the Administration consider that knowing enrollment and revenues are declining, what has been cut. He stressed that there must be a decrease somewhere.

6. **Capital Planning**

JD Head presented on upcoming capital needs that are being considered. Deanne O'Sullivan asked for an update on getting all buildings ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. JD will provide that information in a more comprehensive plan in a few weeks. Paul Murphy is concerned about the Conant issues. Kristina Rychlik asked for recommended dates of when these items are needed. Brigid Bieber asked if there are any efficiencies being seen in the custodial staff with regionalization. JD said there are no FTE reductions but we could see savings in interschool activities for time savings.

7. **Recommendation to Approve FY'16 Carol Huebner Preschool Program Tuition – VOTE –**

- 7.1. FY16 Program Alignment Memo
- 7.2. Current Tuition Rates and Proposed FY16 Rates
- 7.3. Staffing Costs FY15
- 7.4. Tuition Comparables
- 7.5. Community Correspondence

The Superintendent asked for approval for the tuition for the regular education students in this program for next year. The conversation began with a discussion about realigning hours at the last meeting, but the requirement for the Committee is to vote the tuition rate.

Katie Neville stated that there is significant frustration among Acton and Boxborough preschool parents over the proposed tuition and program changes for next year. She feels there is a sense of defeat from Boxborough parents and is concerned that some parents feel they are not being heard. She stated that she is a preschool parent who will be directly affected by this decision, so she will abstain from voting.

Mary Brolin asked about the materials and information provided to families at the meetings, what was mentioned and if they were warned that tuition might increase. Glenn was not sure about the material, but the location was a main focal point. The Committee discussed Mary's idea of a possible process for Boxborough parents where half of the increase might be charged this year and half next year for the four families in this group. Glenn Brand could not recommend this due to concern for inequity with new families that enter the program. Brigid noted that the Committee's purview is the tuition rate and it is still comparative and reasonable. What bothers her more is that the Blanchard program is being changed from a 5 hour day to a 6 ½ hour day, accounting for some of the tuition increase. Her concern is how the tuition and program change were communicated to the families. Maria Neyland agreed, particularly given that preschool parents who are just entering the system are involved. Phasing in would be nice but having different tuition rate for different families feels wrong. She urged the Administration to budget appropriately for scholarships because they may be needed next year by some families.

Several members of the public spoke. A father asked that the Committee take a step back and consider how important exposure to typical kids (who are affected by this tuition increase) is for these young kids with special needs. Nancy Sherburne spoke on behalf of the SpedPAC, and the petition with 60 names. She voiced concern about the perceived lack of partnership and feedback from families on the preschool programs and the educational benefit to students in reducing the hours.

Another father stressed that a 36% increase in tuition is still significant even with the comparisons, but it starts with communication. He urged a phased in approach for the increase. This program does

not exist without typically developing children attending. It concerns him that a delineation between the two groups of children is being made.

Mary Emmons agreed that while it is a mandate to provide these services, the integrated program requires typically developing children. All of the students are held in the highest regard. Kristina Rychlik pointed out that this is a 5% per hour basis increase.

Dennis Bruce moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was

VOTED: to approve the proposed FY16 tuition rates for the Carol Huebner Preschool program for All Day of \$6830 at both sites and for Half Day of \$3530 at both sites.

(YES: Bieber, Bruce, Coppolino, Krishnamurthy, Minkin, Murphy, Neyland, O'Sullivan, Rychlik
NO: Brolin ABSTAINED: Neville)

8. **FY'16 School Calendar** – addition of early release days – **VOTE**

Kristina Rychlik explained that an incorrect email was sent to parents from a PTO asking parents to give their opinion on early dismissals. She has replied to those who responded. Marie Altieri recommended sticking with the first and third Thursdays as early release for elementary every month, and the two conference days as the last two Thursdays in October. Having the Jr High conference days coincide with the elementary half days was considered, but two of the three are on Thursdays and there was a reason it could not be done in December. Next year there are two full professional development days and one half day but the first one is August 31st, before students begin.

Dennis Bruce moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the FY16 school calendar early release days as presented.

9. **Subcommittee Updates**

9.1. **Outreach** – *Kristina Rychlik*

9.2. **Policy**

9.2.1. Special Education Parent Advisory Council, File: BDFB – **SECOND READ** – **VOTE**

Mike Coppolino moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Special Education Parent Advisory Council policy as presented.

Procedures will be revised at a later time.

9.2.2. Enrollment of Students, File: JC – **FIRST READ**

Some of these changes are due to regionalization as well as the need to update.

9.2.3. Assignment of Students from Other Schools to Classes, File: JCAC – **FIRST READ**

9.2.4. Kindergarten Entrance, File: JEB – **FIRST READ**

Marie Altieri gave some background about how requests for children to be held used to be handled regarding testing. This revision is what is actually being done.

9.2.5. School Admissions, File: JF – **FIRST READ**

9.2.5.1. Proposed policy revision with exhibit

A committee was formed to review this policy including looking at other communities' for their best practices. An Administrative intern helped to draft it. All families who are enrolling will now complete an affidavit of residency and show three forms of ID. Because this is new, and a fairly active policy, the detail was kept as policy not as procedures. This is consistent with other communities.

Dennis Bruce asked about an update to the financial policy(s) per the District's auditor. The subcommittee will be doing this. Clare Jeannotte noted the difference between the financial department procedures manual and School Committee policy. The auditor was referring more to the manual in his comments.

Glenn Brand said that MASBO (MA Association of School Business Officials) will come in late February or March to do their review of the District and that will be another opportunity to address this.

10. School Committee Member Reports

10.1. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)– *Mary Brolin*

10.1.1. Financial Statements and Management’s Discussion and Analysis for years ended June 30, 2014 and 2013

A member asked if the auditors have made any recommendations due to the Affordable Care Act. Mary Brolin said they discussed it but nothing that is a huge red flag issue right now. Some discussion took place about employers who provide “rich” plans and are then taxed 40%. HIT is talking about this. Marie said this does not affect the District’s HMOs which covers almost all of our people. The few people that it would affect are retirees and the District may recommend plan design changes to address this.

10.2. Boxborough Board of Selectmen – *Brigid Bieber*

Brigid reported that the BOS was interested in knowing more about the Superintendent Review process so she discussed it with them.

10.3. Joint PTO/PTSO/PTF Co-Chairs – *Deanne O’Sullivan*

At the meeting next Tuesday, Erin Bettez will discuss facilities use. Kristina Rychlik will speak at the Merriam PTO meeting about the budget.

11. Response to 9C Cuts in Regional Transportation – *Kristina Rychlik*

11.1. ABRSC Letter to Governor Patrick and Governor-elect Baker requesting Restoration of 9C Cuts in Regional Transportation from ABRSC, 12/29/14

11.1.1. Letters from other communities

All three elected officials responded to the letter and Kristina has been following up with the Governor’s office. She also spoke to Glenn Koocher of MASC. Glenn followed up with MARS.

12. Acton and Boxborough Local Elections

Kristina Rychlik reminded the Committee and the public of the Town Clerks’ deadlines.

13. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Glenn Brand highlighted “*Broadcasting Happiness, The Science of Igniting & Sustaining Positive Change*”, 1/15/15, 7 p.m. ABRHS Auditorium, sponsored by AB Regional PTSO, AB United Way, Danny’s Place Youth Services. He reminded the public of Kindergarten Registration Night on January 13th. He thanked everyone for their cooperation with the two hour delay this morning due to extreme cold. Three buses did not start so it was helpful to have the extra time.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda

NEXT MEETINGS:

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meetings, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library:
1/22/15 and 2/5/15

FY16 ABRSD Budget Saturday Presentations, 1/31/15 from 8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library