

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
MINUTES (approved 12/18/14)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

November 20, 2014  
7:00 p.m.

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*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

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Chairperson Kristina Rychlik called the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

**1. Chairman’s Introduction**

Student Leaders from the ABRHS Chorus, Elizabeth Belotti and Jesse Waks, gave a wonderful description of their activities, including an amazing impromptu song.

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

Minutes of School Committee Meetings on 9/4/14, 9/18/14 and 10/16/14 will be done at the next meeting. Minutes of meetings on 10/9/14 and 11/6/14 were approved as written. ABRSD Warrant #15-009 dated 10/30/14 in the amount of \$3,638,215.46 and #15-010 dated 11/13/14 in the amount of \$4,410,090.56 were signed by Committee members.

**3. Public Participation - none**

**4. FY16 School Calendar Discussion – SECOND READING – POSSIBLE VOTE**

*(This item was considered after the Lower Fields Report.)*

4.1. Memo for Second Reading

4.2. Proposed Draft #1- Schools Open 9/2/15 (before Labor Day, same as 11/6/14 SC version)

4.3. Proposed Draft #3 – Schools Open 8/31/15 (New version)

Draft #3 would require a side letter from the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) because per Article 9.2 of their contract, “.... Teachers will not be scheduled to report more than two calendar days before the scheduled arrival of students.....” Sixty percent of the ABEA membership responded to a survey asking about the two calendar versions. Of those who responded, 71% preferred Draft #1. Consequently, the Administration recommended Draft #1. Maria Neyland will not vote for either version due to concern over how late in June the year would end, and because she will not support a calendar that cancels school for a religious holiday.

Several Committee members asked that the Administration consider possible changes to the vacations when discussion about the FY17 calendar begins. This could include perhaps giving a long weekend in February instead of a full week off, or combining the February and April weeks. Discussion with the community will be essential. It was noted that not having school on religious holidays has been in the press often lately. It was agreed that with all the constraints, it is difficult to have the flexibility that members might like to set the school calendar.

Mike Coppolino moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was  
**VOTED:** to adopt Option #1 for the FY16 school calendar.  
(NO: Bruce, Neyland)

Glenn Brand suggested that the Committee reconsider their policy IC to vote two years at a time instead of one.

**5. Disciplinary Literacy Presentation**

Beth Baker and Allison Warner gave a very informative presentation on the Disciplinary Literacy work being done at the Junior High and High School. They described the need to intentionally teach students how to read various types of information – books, math calculations, chemical diagrams and original source text like the Constitution. They described how powerful it is for students who might struggle with reading in one area, but find they have strong literacy skills in another area. This work is funded through a Title 2A grant. Their slides were adapted from Jacy Ippolito's DESE presentation on 10/27/14. Brigid Bieber observed how complicated teaching has become today and how important professional development is as a result.

**6. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpEd PAC) Presentation on MCAS Highlights**

Amanda Bailey thanked Deb Bookis for her MCAS presentation at the last meeting and appreciated the chance to offer more insight into the group of students whom the SpedPAC represents. They asked if the Administration knows what is driving the low 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade special education student performance, and if the District is structured and staffed to support High Needs students effectively particularly given the increasing demand. They asked if staffing levels allow for successful implementation of research-based best practices in special education and if adequate and appropriate professional development is provided to all staff working with these students.

Glenn Brand emphasized that the use of MCAS data as one measure of student performance is taken seriously. The Administration analyzes trends and where efforts can be made to address issues, they are. Mary Emmons stated that Lynne Laramie has met with the elementary principals about this. Mary and Deborah Bookis are also involved in these meetings to talk about how issues can be addressed. Mary said that this cohort of students seems to do fine as they move through the years but specific grades do present some issues (4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade) so Deb Bookis is looking at this. Mary Brolin asked if there is a misalignment in the curriculum between what is on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade tests. She encouraged the Administration to "think in different ways" because what has been done doesn't seem to be successful. Mike Coppolino mentioned that a similar problem existed a few years ago and after some focused attention to that specific problem, things turned around. He noted the results use the aggregate that includes special education and regular education students together. If the special education students were separated out of the data, the gap would be enormous between the two groups. Mike asked Glenn Brand to address this.

Paul Murphy expressed concern about the 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA students' growth slide. Dennis Bruce noted that budget season has begun and if costs are going to increase in this area, it will be important to identify reasons. Mike Coppolino encouraged the administration to consider realigning resources, and not necessarily allocating more money. Requiring more professional development may be an option. Deborah Bookis is thinking about interventions for special education and regular education students, and creating a 5 year plan of realignment and perhaps some budgetary items. Mary Brolin stated that this needs to be one of the District's priorities, to address these special education students' issues.

7. **Finance Department Update**

7.1. FY'15 Financial Report, 10/31/14

Clare Jeannotte updated the Committee as of 10/31/14, indicating that the District is doing fine regarding expenditures in most areas, but the six drivers that comprise 89% of the budget could be a concern regarding projections. These include: salaries/stipends, fringe, legal service, sped transportation, student transportation and sped tuition. The one-time credit that we receive will help mitigate this, but it is only one time. See memo in packet. On 11/19/14 (night before this meeting), Governor Patrick processed new 9C cuts, which reduced the amount of reimbursement to approximately 60 – 63%. The reimbursement assumed in the budget was 80% , an impact of \$378,000 less in regional reimbursement. Circuit breaker is expected to be unchanged. Glenn Brand is meeting with leaders of the larger departments to see where we can pull back financially if necessary for this year, FY15.

Clare was asked to see if increasing the use of E and D again would be an option based on this new information.

8. **Lower Fields Annual Meeting Report**

Erin Bettez presented on the Annual Meeting held 10/23/14. She asked for input from the Committee on two items:

1. Because FOLF has achieved the first three priorities for rental revenue (per the MOU), and they have sufficient funds for the fourth (pay up to \$25,000 toward the district's bond fees), FOLF wonders if they should pay down the loan sooner instead of the bond fees. This would transfer ownership of the facility sooner to the district, saving money as the rate for the FOLF loan is higher than the bond financing (5.25% vs. 2.75%)
2. Should the ground lease be extended two years? FOLF would like to take advantage of the good relationships that are currently in place and extending the lease would help ensure this rental income. The Committee asked that legal advice be obtained regarding how this could be done.

While some concern has been expressed in the news recently about some turf field material, Erin said that JD Head and the Lower Fields Committee were aware of this issue when the project was built and the material used has been tested for safety. Dennis Bruce wants the lights and pockets and the net to go around the corner in the back field. He is afraid that someone will get hurt going to get the ball when it goes out.

Deanne O'Sullivan would like more opportunities for the community to use the fields. The Committee discussed the ongoing issues with traffic and congestion. Groups and parents need to talk to kids and be sure they follow the rules. A police officer may be needed when parking is full and parents won't move their cars from the flow of traffic.

9. **FY15 Superintendent and District Goals – SECOND READ – VOTE**

Kristina Rychlik thanked Glenn for his thoughtful approach to this year's goals.

Brigid Bieber moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED:** to accept the Superintendent's District Goals for FY15.

10. **Subcommittee Updates**

10.1. **Outreach** – *Kristina Rychlik*

10.2. **Budget** – first meeting to be 12/10/14 - *Kristina Rychlik*

### 10.3. Policy

#### 10.3.1. Consent Agenda #7 – **FIRST READ** – *Maria Neyland*

##### 10.3.1.1. Use of School Facilities, File: KF

Reference to Lower Fields needs to be added to this policy and the procedures. Reference to Boxborough will also be added in several places in the procedures.

##### 10.3.1.2. Homeschooling, File: IHBG

Deborah Bookis will confirm reference to “Care and Protection of Charles” law.

#### 10.3.2. Public Participation at School Committee Meetings, File: BEDH (new) – **SECOND READ**

Mary Brolin moved, Kathleen Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the new Public Participation at School Committee Meetings policy as proposed.

#### 10.3.3. Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI), File: ADDA (new) – **SECOND READ** –

Brigid Bieber moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the CORI policy as proposed

#### 10.3.4. Fingerprint-Based Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) Checks, File: ADDB (new) – **SECOND READ**

Brigid Bieber moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the new Fingerprint-based Criminal History Record Information Check policy as proposed.

#### 10.3.5. Elementary Class Size Guidelines, File: IIBA – **FIRST READ** – *Marie Altieri*

##### 10.3.5.1. Memo with Class Size Options Chart

##### 10.3.5.2. Proposed New Policy

##### 10.3.5.3. Former Acton and Boxborough Policies

Procedures will be updated and include what will happen if the number of students goes over the guidelines.

## 11. School Committee Member Reports

### 11.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG)

#### 11.1.1. Materials from 11/20/14 meeting

#### 11.1.2. Acton Finance Committee Point of View for 11/20/14

Kristina reported on the meeting held 11/20/14. ALG has consensus on a max 2 ½ % tax increase however the Acton FinCom’s POV document has 2% . There is concern because ALG is supposed to be a group that reaches consensus. Steve Noone proposed a subcommittee to discuss cost savings ideas. It was agreed that the School Committee will work on these kinds of issues as a board, not a joint board, given that they just created the Budget Subcommittee.

Maria Neyland stated that she is concerned that ALG appears to be dictating the ABRSD budget. She appreciates advice, and wants to work with everyone, but this does not seem right to her. Putting the OPEB contribution level out there was a first step to a working relationship. Mike Coppolino appreciated seeing the use of “net reserves” in the POV and feels it is a cogent document that makes sense. Dennis Bruce emphasized the importance of the ALG reps bringing School Committee’s input to the ALG table and to the Finance Committee. He noted that OPEB funding now goes into the Region, not the Town’s account, so there is a whole set of new issues that the OPEB group needs to be aware of. The Committee agreed to have some OPEB training at a future meeting.

### 11.2. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)

Mary Brolin reported that there could be a potential increase of 6-8% from the meeting on 11/20/14.

### 11.3. Acton-Boxborough SpedPAC

Paul Murphy has been talking with our legislators about the population trends of our high risk students. He proposed sending letters with the data to Rep. Jennifer Benson and Rep. Cory Atkins in hopes of making changes. He spoke with Concord, Chelmsford, Ayer and other School Committees and they are willing to sign on. Sped PACs may also want to sign or write a similar letters. Kristina suggested they reconsider the amount being asked for based on the data and trends we are experiencing. Paul pointed out that this issue involves very high needs students, such as those in residential settings.

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

**12. Superintendent’s Report - *Update on District Committees***

- 12.1. District Safety & Emergency, chaired by the Superintendent
- 12.2. Superintendent’s Safety Task Force, chaired by the Superintendent
- 12.3. Anti-Bullying & Harassment Review, chaired by Todd Chicko & Priscilla Kotyk
- 12.4. School Wellness Advisory, chaired by Diana McNicholas & Diane Spring, met this week
- 12.5. School Start Times Study Group

Glenn agrees that this is a large group, but wants representation from all of the schools. It was suggested that School Council members “or designees” be asked to participate as they are connected to what is happening in the schools. A teacher from each grade level could be included, and/or a parent from each level (elementary, JH, HS).

Mary Brolin expressed frustration that this is a solution for a problem that has not been defined yet. She and Kristina agreed that refocusing is needed. Kristina thought the Committee had tasked the subcommittee with defining the problem. Deanne O’Sullivan stated that wellness is a whole different issue. She thought the study group was brought up to discuss school start times and the issues when it comes to JH and HS age students’ biorhythms and mental health. The Committee was invited to watch their last meeting when this topic was discussed. Maria wants to be sure that student input is included, even if they are not on the subcommittee. It was concluded that the Committee “will come back to this”.

Members are being confirmed and meetings scheduled for the other groups.

**13. FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

13.1. Acton CPC Proposal for Nature Play Spaces Construction

The District was approved to do a survey plan, and this application requests funding to build it. If approved, \$33,700 will come from the appropriated budget. The application is for \$131,900 and will be presented to the CPC in January. If approved, it must be voted at April Town Meeting. This is one source of funding and others sources will be pursued. Project will be phased in, based on how much funding is received. Deborah Bookis was thanked for her work on this.

The ABRSC was adjourned at 10:33 pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

**NEXT MEETINGS:**

12/4/14 and 12/18/14, **ABRSC** Meetings, 7:00 p.m. Junior High Library

1/8/15 and 1/22/15, **ABRSC** Meetings, 7:00 p.m. Junior High Library