

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Open Meeting Minutes (approved 6/22/17)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

June 8, 2017
6:30 p.m. Executive Session
7:00 p.m. (approx.) Open Business Meeting

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Tess McKinley, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: none
Others: Marie Altieri (7:22 p.m.), Dawn Bentley (7:22 p.m.), Deborah Bookis (7:22 p.m.), Glenn Brand (7:22 p.m.), Clare Jeannotte (7:22 p.m.), Beth Petr

1. The ABRSC was called to order by Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy at 6:30 p.m.

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Amy stated that the Committee needed to enter executive session to review and approve executive session minutes under the same reasons entered for the three sessions.

At 6:30 p.m., it was moved by Amy Krishnamurthy, seconded by Mary Brolin and unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session *convened under M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §21(a)(3)* for strategy with respect to collective bargaining sessions with representatives of the employees of the Acton Boxborough Regional School District (Acton-Boxborough Education Association, Office Support Association, and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) regarding health insurance benefits to review and approve minutes of 5/15/17, and that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board.

(YES – Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Neville, O'Sullivan, Rychlik, Zhang)

At 6:31 p.m., it was moved by Amy Krishnamurthy, seconded by Brigid Bieber and unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session *convened under M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §21(a)(2)* to review and approve minutes of the executive session held on 5/2/17 to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

(YES – Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Neville, O'Sullivan, Rychlik, Zhang)

At 6:32 p.m., it was moved by Amy Krishnamurthy, seconded by Paul Murphy and unanimously,

VOTED by roll call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session *convened under M.G.L. Chapter 30A, §21(a)(1)* to review and approve minutes of the executive session held on 4/26/17 to consider the discipline or dismissal of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual.

(YES – Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Neville, O'Sullivan, Rychlik, Zhang)

Amy Krishnamurthy stated that the Open Session will reconvene at the conclusion of the executive session at approximately 7:00 p.m.

3. **The ABRSC Returned to Open Meeting at 7:22p.m.**

4. **Chairman's Introduction** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

5. **Recommendation to Accept Donation from Acton Boxborough Student Activities Fund (ABSFAF) – VOTE** – *Glenn Brand*

Dr. Brand welcomed ABSFAF President Heather Harer and the students to the meeting. A check for \$72,000 was presented to the District for next year. Heather said that over the years, ABSFAF has donated over \$600,000 to our schools.

Paul Murphy moved, Katie Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the ABSFAF donation with gratitude.

6. **Statement of Warrant and Approval of Open Meeting Minutes**

6.1. ABRSC Meetings of 5/30/17, 5/24/17, 5/18/17 (*next meeting*), 5/15/17

The meeting minutes of 5/30/17, 5/24/17 and 5/15/17 were approved as written.

6.2. The warrants were reviewed and signed by the Committee members. See attached list.

7. **Open Meeting Law Complaints Received** – *Beth Petr*

7.1. A. Kenney – requesting open meeting minutes of 4/26/17

7.1.1. Complaint received on 5/26/17

7.1.2. Resolution on 5/26/17

7.1.3. AG Letter of Closure received 5/30/17

7.2. G Silverio – requesting open meeting minutes of 5/2/17

7.2.1. Complaint received on 5/26/17

7.2.2. Partial Resolution on 5/26/17

7.2.3. Proposed Response to Resolve to be sent 6/9/17

8. **Recommendation to ratify, confirm and approve the Separation and Release Agreement between the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee and the Superintendent signed by Dr. Mary Brolin and Dr. Glenn Brand on May 17, 2017 – VOTE** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

This item is a legally required vote in open meeting to ratify the Agreement that was signed.

Brigid Bieber moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to ratify, confirm and approve the Separation and Release Agreement between the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee and the Superintendent signed by Dr. Mary Brolin and Dr. Glenn Brand on May 17, 2017.

9. **Public Participation**

Allen Nitschelm spoke from the audience asking questions about the 2013-2014 Superintendent search process. He noted that Brigid Bieber who is currently on the School Committee was the chair of that search. At that time, he asked Brigid whether other job descriptions were used when creating Acton's. Brigid said that the ad was created by the search firm. No specific degree qualifications were mentioned, although the search in 2009 that resulted in appointing Dr. Mills did specify that a Master's Degree was required with an advanced degree preferred. Allen asked Brigid if a Master's Degree was required for the 2013-2014 search and if not, how many applicants did not have one. Paul Murphy raised a point of order that questions should be directed to the Committee Chair, not individual members. Amy stated that Allen could continue. Brigid replied that she would have to go back to the records to confirm what the subcommittee assumed at that time.

A member of the public asked what the policy regarding responding to emails sent to the Committee was because she had not received any responses over the past couple of weeks. Amy Krishnamurthy said that

typically the Chair tries to respond in 5 days but it depends how complicated the question is. Amy said that she would go back and look for this person's emails and others that have come in and respond.

10. ABRSD Master Plan / School Building Project Update

10.1. **Presentation: District Master Plan Review Committee (DMPRC) Presentation & Recommendation** – *Mary Brolin, Marie Altieri*

Mary Brolin and Marie Altieri presented the Report and Recommendations. The Committee was reminded that the report is based on the study done by Dore & Whittier that only looked at current sites because it is believed that there are no suitable properties in Acton that could be purchased for a school. A vote on feasibility and design funds will be done at Special Town Meetings in Acton and Boxborough on 12/4/17. Plans may very well change as the feasibility study is done.

The Committee discussed the possible Early Childhood Center (ECC). Marie clarified that this would include all of the preschools and all Kindergartens across the 6 schools. A lot of feedback was received on this and the next few months will be spent exploring the pros and cons of all of the plans. Deanne O'Sullivan wanted to talk about the school start time study regarding young children who she said appear to learn better in the early morning. Marie stated that with an ECC, the district could consider what the best schedule would be for children of that age.

A community member felt that feedback from only 266 people was a low number and expressed caution about making decisions based on it. The Committee described the extensive outreach effort that took place over the past few months in a number of different ways. The topic was considered fairly complicated with all the options offered. Kristina Rychlik described the commitment needed from people to spend 30 minutes watching a presentation and then an hour for the discussion before they filled out the form. Media, social media, and hard copy flyers were used. Moving forward there will be many opportunities for the public to be involved. The School Building Committee will kick off next Wednesday and the public is welcome to attend.

Allen Nitschelm asked about the cost estimate, and stated that people need to know about cost before they express their opinions. He thinks 266 is a low number, and is concerned that input from staff/employees has been mixed with public/taxpayers' comments. He thinks staff should be considered regarding the ECC, but they are not paying for it. Mary Brolin explained that broad costs are included in the presentation but the design and feasibility phase will provide more realistic cost. She said that the online packet has lots of cost data and it is cut by residents and staff. When asked if the recommendation would require an override, Mary said that the design must be completed before it is known if an override will be needed.

Another member of the public described how when a change is made in his work, it is modeled extensively. He strongly encouraged members to look at how changing the plans would change things like people, traffic, buses, kids, etc. He asked what the District plans to do to understand that quantitatively. Mary replied that that is what will be done if the two towns approve the feasibility funding in December. She said that is why they went from 7 options to 2 so during the feasibility study, they could review all of those aspects for 2 plans, not spend more money looking at 7 options. Mary urged the gentleman to stay involved.

Kristina Rychlik described how the experiences the District has had with our current twin school, were used to create a document written by two of our twin school teachers. Some issues with the Parker Damon Building have to do more with that particular design, not necessarily that it is two schools, including dismissal, shared spaces, lunch time, and more.

A member of the public spoke about the frustration she hears from parents about buses and walker status for Kindergarteners and said that these play out for families in a big way. If something comes up land wise, she hopes the building committee would keep that in mind.

Getting people to read their emails and increasing public participation was discussed. Including the video link in an email was suggested. Kristina outlined that school emails to parents were done, social media, The Beacon, Action Unlimited, Community Education catalogue and the Council on Aging were also used.

It was asked how the Committee plans to engage the folks who are not supportive of the options. Marie Altieri stated that the last phase was about getting from 7 options to a more reasonable number to work with. It will be much easier now with the 2 options to get feedback and outreach in next phase. The big question is whether or not an Early Childhood Center should be done. More refined costs will be available by December, but not full design costs. The numbers previously used assumed the District would undertake every task in every building which is why they are so high.

Steve Ballard from the Boxborough Finance Committee and a former teacher at schools that have been through similar changes, was critical of the process so far and used the Boxborough Public Safety Building process as an example.

10.2. Massachusetts School Business Authority (MSBA) Update on Deadlines – *Glenn Brand*
Dr. Brand reviewed the list and stated that the District is on schedule.

10.3. ABRSD School Building Committee (Form submitted to MSBA 6/1/17) – *Kristina Rychlik*
The public was invited to the first meeting on Wednesday night.

11. Presentation: ABRSD Revised Homework Policy – *Deborah Bookis*

Deborah Bookis outlined the process that began in October of last year to reconsider the District's homework policy. Many people have been involved in the draft being proposed, from senior administrators to principals to teachers and the policy subcommittee. This is a First Read for the School Committee and the community.

Diane Baum has reviewed the NES principals' guidelines around homework and she noted that: 1. Homework should not be used as a behavior tool 2. Parents should not help with it. 3. There should be no time restriction on it. Deborah said that the 10 minute per grade rule is not research based. Some kids take more time to do homework, so it needs to be reasonable. Regarding the equity piece about being able to do homework on their own, not all students have help available at home with homework. Deb said that it was a given that homework not be used as a punishment.

Eileen Zhang asked about the reading homework. Deborah said that reading assignments can start in grade 3, and assigned reading will happen so students can then come to class to discuss material. Reading at the end is what considered Choice Reading. We do ask students to do lots of reading. Eileen asked how the data was gathered to make this policy change. She saw the High School students' survey but asked if there is data from the elementary students. Deborah replied that the data is from the Challenge Success survey two years ago. Research was also reviewed and read, and many conversations were held with principals and teachers. Eileen noted that parents' input seemed to be missing from the policy development.

Amy Krishnamurthy stated that comments could be sent to Brigid Bieber or Deb Bookis before the second read and possible vote on June 22.

Eileen Zhang asked why quality and engagement are more important than quantity and achievement. Paul Murphy said that he loves this idea and it reminded him of a Boston Globe article by David McCulloch who listed all of the awards that his famous father had won, but his point was that none of them were things that he actually went after. His dad did something that he loved and received these awards as a result of his passion. Paul felt that it is wrong to dangle awards in front of kids in order to educate them. Eileen asked why these things could not all be combined together. Deborah explained that there is a relationship between them. We do want kids to be engaged internally as well, we just don't want them to focus on how much homework, but on the quality of the homework. The District uses the School Committee policy only as a guide. There has already been a shift in how homework is handled in many of our schools.

Eileen Zhang said that the district needs to think about maximizing all students' potential, at both ends of the learning curve. She asked if there could be consideration of optional homework for some student, perhaps with different speed or perspective. Deborah said that they rely on the professional judgement of our educators to ensure that homework is engaging and appropriate for our students.

Conant School Principal Damian Sugrue added that the younger students' most important job is to get outside, play, spend time with their families, learn to self-regulate and recharge. He stated that if their focus is on homework, they are missing out on something really important. (Eileen clarified that she was talking about High School students.) Damian said that we used to treat 3rd and 4th graders like 7th graders and that was not good. The proposed homework policy is a better match for what students need at that age.

Brigid Bieber appreciated how comprehensive the proposed policy is and how it builds on other district initiatives. She suggested giving more than two weeks for public comment before voting on it so families could talk about it at home. She thanked the administration for the lengthy and thoughtful process.

Deanne O'Sullivan loved the changes for grades 7-12 and how it falls in with the wellness policy. She is in an elementary school with no homework though and some parents are not happy about it. She asked if there will there be some tweaks made. Deborah answered yes, and referred to slide 7 about engagement.

It was agreed that the principals would email their families about the proposed policy and invite them to share their thoughts about it with the School Committee prior to the next meeting.

The Committee discussed how different children are about reading. Some families need the direction from the teachers regarding their kids' free reading because not all kids automatically pick up a book. Leveled reading lists are on the website and teachers can help parents find appropriate books at their children's independent, not instructional, level.

Kristina Rychlik asked about parents giving their children homework and wondered if it has fed into the desire to change the homework policy. She asked if students are getting more stressed because they are getting homework from other sources as well as school.

Deborah was asked if the data from the student survey could be shared with parents. Deb said this homework data was part of the December 2016 Challenge Success newsletter that was sent out. Coordination of homework between different subjects in the High School was mentioned as an issue. Deb was asked how that is addressed and how will it be implemented. Would the teacher or the student be penalized? Deborah said that homework is the work for next year. Electronically administrators will coordinate when tests and projects will be given as well as assessments. There is a revision in the High School handbook next year to move from 3 to 2 tests on the same day as a trigger for allowing one to be rescheduled. It will take time to work through all these changes. The Junior High and High School are also working on different schedules as well.

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Principal Dr. JoAnn Campbell said that talking about a homework policy is only half of the conversation, the other half is instruction. Math practice and access to technology are important. Some people say if we can't ensure equity we should not have homework.

A parent spoke about her younger children and how they needed to come home and practice to learn. She asked if the teachers would now be doing all that practice with the students, and what would they not be able to do if they are doing this during classroom time. Deborah replied that teachers will use math games and fun and engaging for kids to continue to learn. This parent also stressed that she volunteered in the classroom and asked kids about the book they had read and it was wonderful. She feels like this is really important to find good books and encourage this kind of discussion with children.

A local parent who is also a teacher remarked that she liked how the policy is general but still has guidelines. She encouraged the Administration to test the policy and play with it, to see how the children react to it. In the

school where she teaches, they have no homework for young students and limited homework for older kids. Kids are engaged and invested in their education and are achieving. She noted that older children also need to play.

The Administration was asked how this will be monitored to see if it is successful. Deborah Bookis explained that teachers are always talking with their children and talking to pediatricians and nurses regarding signs of stress. Hopefully these signs will be lessened, but they will watch for them. It's important to incorporate the wellness piece. There are also benchmark reading and math assessments, and the Challenge Success survey can be readministered next year or the next year.

12. Presentation: School Start Time Committee Report – Glenn Brand, Marie Altieri

Given the late hour, Dr. Brand and Ms. Altieri went through the slides quickly, but emphasized that there is a lot of data included in the presentation and an extensive report. Marie suggested that people read through it for discussion at a future meeting. Regarding the Recommendation Slide, Option 4 was preferred to Option 3 and improves things for all children K-12. This is just the beginning of the process and recommendations would begin in September 2018. It is important to keep in mind that there are budgetary implications. The District would need 11 additional buses and 11 new drivers. Currently we have 34 drivers and they are hard to find. The District could possibly outsource the additional 11 drivers needed.

Eileen Zhang said that at the April meeting, option 4 was her favorite, but she remembers the concern about the budget and asked if it is possible to implement this in two steps. Eileen suggested starting at 7:50 a.m. with the high school and junior high, and then survey all of Acton and Boxborough residents.

Given the late hour, the Chair asked if the Committee could discuss this at the June 22 meeting. Deanne O'Sullivan expressed concern that June 22 is now the last day of school and not a good time to be asking for community feedback. Brigid Bieber agreed to discuss this on June 22, but asked to let the public in attendance at the meeting speak.

A member of the public stated that she also thinks about the cost savings and mental health benefits. She would like to see a lot more information about that. She has read a lot of research and it all says to start at 8:30 a.m. or later but when she sees the 8:00 time, it sounds like we are doing a half way solution. She asked how the district is balancing that information.

Another member of the public noted the interdependency between this survey initiative and the capital planning survey initiative. He added that the more nodes in the network, the more complications there will be. He asked how the District can arrive at an objective to get clear standard start times with the tradeoff of other factors, and then can add in cost and complexity.

13. Recommendation to Approve Administrators' Benefits Manual – VOTE – Marie Altieri/Glenn Brand

Katie Neville moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Administrators' Benefits Manual as proposed.

14. Recommendation to Approve Next Year's Food & Related Products Bid Award – VOTE – Clare Jeannotte

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

VOTED: to approve next year's Food and Related Products Bid Award as presented.

15. ABRHS Handbook for 2017-2018, Review of Changes – Second Reading – VOTE – Glenn Brand

Katie Neville moved, Deanne O'Sullivan seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the High School Handbook as presented with updates to be included once the homework policy is voted.

16. Recommendation to Approve Solar Net Metering Credit Agreement – Second Read – VOTE - JD Head

10.1 Memo and Proposed Agreement

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the Solar Net Metering Credit Agreement as proposed.

17. **ABRSD Budget Update – Glenn Brand**

17.1. FY17 Year End Financial Status

Katie Neville asked if MSBA money was going to be considered for the Blanchard School boilers. Dr. Brand said that JD Head is looking for a grant to possibly fund those. Mary Brolin and Brigid Bieber supported the projects outlined in the memo and said this is exactly what the District should be doing.

18. **Subcommittee Reports**

18.1. Budget meeting on 5/31/17 – *(next meeting)*

18.2. Policy

18.2.1. Homework Policy, File: IKB – First Read – *Brigid Bieber (see presentation #7.)*

18.2.2. Website Accessibility, File: NEW - First Read – *Dawn Bentley*

Dawn Bentley reviewed the new policy. The District has a due date of June 30th per the resolution agreement to the OCR Complaint that was filed. Much of the language in the proposed policy is from the resolution. A question was asked why only the new and modified material is required to be accessible. Dawn replied that eventually all material on the site will need to be done, but with 600+ website pages currently, the priority is new material. The cost will be approximately \$10,000 – \$15,000 for the initial start. Dawn hopes to have a better estimate in the next few weeks. A request was made to improve the ease for finding material on the site.

18.3. Outreach (including PTO Co-chairs) – *Kristina Rychlik (oral)*

19. **School Committee Member Reports** *(These reports will be given at next meeting due to the time)*

20. **Recommendation to Accept Anonymous \$10,000 Donation to Athletics – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Diane Baum moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the anonymous donation to ABRSD Athletics with gratitude.

21. **Recommendation to Accept \$2,889 MassCue Grant Donation to ABRSD Ed Tech Department – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the MassCue Grant Donation to the ABRSD Ed Tech Department.

22. **Recommendation to Accept \$1,495 donation from ABRPTSO to the Jr High School – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Tessa McKinley seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept this donation from the ABRPTSO to the Junior High with gratitude.

23. **FY18 ABRSC Summer Workshop and August Business Meeting– Amy Krishnamurthy (next meeting)**

23.1. FY18 ABRSC Meetings with proposed dates added – Second Read - **VOTE**

24. **Superintendent’s Report/Updates – Glenn Brand**

25. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

25.1. Thank you to the Northern District Attorney Marian Ryan’s Office for \$500 donation to ABRHS Project Graduation

25.2. Discipline Reports, 6/1/17, ABRHS and RJG Jr High School

25.3. Announcement of Hiring of Leo Muellner, ABRSD Director of Visual Arts

25.4. Letter to Town of Acton re Inter-Municipal Agreement for Leary Field

25.5. Expanding our Notion of Success, June 2017 <https://www.smore.com/ppt3z>

25.6. Schedule for Last Day of School, Thursday, June 22, 2017

25.7. Statement from Superintendent Brand, 6/6/17

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of documents used: See agenda, List of Warrants, Email from E. Jacobson dated 5/31/17

NEXT MEETINGS:

- **NEW: Tuesday, June 13** – ABRSC Meeting (Next Steps for the District) at 7:30 p.m. in the Jr High Library (material to be posted June 9)
- June 22 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (material posted June 16)