

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
MINUTES (approved 1/12/17)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 15, 2016  
7:00 p.m.

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*Members Present:* Diane Baum (7:10 p.m.), Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin (8:10 p.m.), Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang (7:05 p.m.)

*Members Absent:* none

*Others:* Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr, members of the public for the school calendar discussion

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Chair Mary Brolin called the ABRSC to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. **Chairman’s Introduction** – Annual Spring Town Elections  
Paul Murphy may not run for reelection, he is not certain. Amy Krishnamurthy and Maya Minkin plan to run for reelection. Maria Neyland will not run again from Boxborough. The Acton deadline to submit papers is February 7 and Boxborough’s deadline is March 28.
2. **Statement of Warrant & Approval of Minutes**
  - 2.1. Minutes of the ABRSC Meetings of 11/17/16 and 12/1/16 will be reviewed at the next meeting.
  - 2.2. The warrants were reviewed and signed by the Committee members. See attached list.
3. **Public Participation** - none
4. **FY18 Budget Pres. #2- “Superintendent’s Preliminary Budget Request”** – Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Marie Altieri
  - 4.1. Financial Information
  - 4.2. Capital Requests
  - 4.3. Personnel Requests
  - 4.4. Enrollment, Special Education, English Language Learners
  - 4.5. Presentation Slides

Dr. Brand presented the preliminary budget request representing a total increase of 4.2% (\$3,471,785) in overall expenses from the current FY17 budget. The modest increase in staffing is centered around supporting our more at risk students. This budget incorporates the Minuteman Middle School Program Assessment for the first time.

Marie Altieri will ask the Department of Education how they calculate “economically disadvantaged” vs the “free and reduced lunch” figures. They are similar numbers but different. Referring to slide 33, Dawn Bentley is moving into the ELL Administrative role due to the increase in number of students. This will allow the current Administrator to do more direct service to students. When asked why so many students who need ELL services are at Conant, Marie explained that that was how it worked out as the students arrived and registered. Class sizes and the waiting lists for choices are involved. Marie said the administration is reviewing this process. Assistant Coaches are currently unequally funded by Booster groups and it has become an equity issue because it forces groups to try to raise sometimes large amounts of money. Athletic Director Steve Martin will explain this on Budget Saturday.

Regarding the Debt Service slide (#13), Clare confirmed that it is a continued \$25,000 donation from FOLF. Dr. Brand said that by Budget Saturday, they hoped to have some of the alternative funding

mechanisms for these items. Maria Neyland asked about slide #30 “Students Receiving Special Education Services” and whether the District’s 16.9% of students with disabilities in FY16 was high. Marie replied that the state average is 17.2% so we are just below. There will be a full explanation of this at Budget Saturday, including details on the special education “Out of District” savings if the District is able to keep some students in house with the expansion of the Pathways program. Marie explained that it is more accurate to say the students have been kept “In District”, they just did not have to go out for their services. We may be able to tuition students into this program if there are seats available. Dr. Brand reiterated that Pamela Smith and Dawn Bentley are reviewing all of this and will bring detail to Budget Saturday.

Paul Murphy asked how the circuit breaker and transportation estimates used last year have come in. Clare Jeannotte stated that they came in better than estimated. She has not heard anything to say that the numbers should be decreased for next year, although she likes to be conservative. The Committee commented again on the difficulty of predicting the number of kindergarten students.

Deanne O’Sullivan said that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade is a big class with a significant number of special education students. Marie replied that there is a bubble of students in grades 4-8 coming up with special education service needs and the administration is planning for them.

## 5. **FY18 Revolving Budgets and Fees**

### 5.1. **Consent Agenda - Second Read - VOTE** – *Mary Brolin*

*Proposed Motion: Move to approve the FY18 Fees as proposed with no change for fees in Athletics and All Day Kindergarten, and an increase of \$240 per year for the All Day Early Childhood Program to \$7,070, an increase of \$120 per year for the Half Day Early Childhood Program to \$3,650 and an increase of \$1,152 per year for the Occupational Development Program (ODP) to \$34,057.*

#### 5.1.1. **Athletics** – *Steven Martin*

#### 5.1.2. **Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program** – *Dawn Bentley*

#### 5.1.3. **Occupational Development Program (ODP)** – *Dawn Bentley*

#### 5.1.4. **All Day Kindergarten** – *Marie Altieri*

Mary Brolin asked about each item to see if there were any holds by Committee members. There were none. Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the FY18 Fees as proposed with no change for fees in Athletics and All Day Kindergarten, and an increase of \$240 per year for the All Day Early Childhood Program to \$7,070, an increase of \$120 per year for the Half Day Early Childhood Program to \$3,650 and an increase of \$1,152 per year for the Occupational Development Program (ODP) to \$34,057.

### 5.2. **Food Services** – *(next meeting)*

### 5.3. **Community Education** – *Erin Bettez*

Director Erin Bettez described the goals for Community Education as to improve the financial analyses of the programs and to continue to watch trends and modify offerings to match community interests. Her challenges are that decreased enrollment affects participation and space limits offerings. She is always looking for new ideas, and encouraged folks to give her a call if they have any suggestions.

## 6. **Minuteman Technical High School Update (MMT)** – *Mary Brolin*

### 6.1. Intergovernmental Agreement Between MMT and ABRSD – **First Read** - *Glenn Brand*

A revised Agreement was brought to the meeting. Minor changes from Clare Jeannotte, Marie Altieri and Andrew Shen have been incorporated and it was presented to the MMT School Committee but they took no action at their recent meeting. Dr. Brand shared this version with our counsel. His intention is to bring a final version for a vote in January. Diane Baum expressed concern that moving this program from town funding to district funding makes it vulnerable. She emphasized that this program is the exception to “pencil and paper” teaching. She described robust programs like MMT’s as an experience that is not just nice to have, but critical particularly for students who don’t fit the typical model.

Mary Brolin stated that she believes both towns have a strong commitment to this kind of program. Dr. Brand added that there is no intention to discontinue the MMT program at our Junior High. Deanne O’Sullivan feels this change makes the program more secure now. Kristina Rychlik pointed out that by including the cost into the school budget, it will artificially inflate the budget a little so people should be aware. It was suggested that

the item be broken out separately as presented tonight, so people will understand. Deborah Bookis noted that from a teaching and learning perspective, the entire science and engineering strand of learning is taught in this program, making it highly valued by the school system and the teachers. Mary Brolin said that the work with ALG and BLF should emphasize that there should be a corresponding decrease in the two towns' budgets as a result of this change.

7. **Recommendation to Approve FY18 ABRSD School Calendar – *Second Read* – VOTE - Marie Altieri**
  - 7.1. Calendar Survey and Recommendations Memo
  - 7.2. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #A (no school on Good Friday & Rosh Hashana)
  - 7.3. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #B
  - 7.4. Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) Contract Language
  - 7.5. Massachusetts and Federal Legal Holidays 2017
  - 7.6. Acknowledging Religious Holidays, Policy and Procedures, File: ACD
  - 7.7. Renaming “Columbus Day” to “Indigenous Peoples Day” on 10/9/17 – **Second Read - VOTE**

Mary Brolin thanked the public for the 50+ emails that were received regarding the calendar. All expressed support for continuing to have no school on Good Friday, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur (although this is on a Saturday in 2017). Many members of the public were in attendance.

It was the sense of the Committee that the start date for the FY18 school year, should be September 5 for students, as discussed at the last meeting on 12/1/16.

**The Committee discussed whether or not to continue the practice of having no school on Good Friday, and Rosh Hashana.**

Kathleen Neville noted that this discussion has not taken place since regionalization with all 11 School Committee members. Before K-12 regionalization, the Blanchard School held school on these days. She stated that all students are entitled to feel like their holiday is important, and the Committee and Administration can create an environment where all are respected, including the policy currently in place. She advocated support for Option B with no religious holidays off.

Deanne O’Sullivan asked why this issue was up for discussion, stating, “Our calendar represents our community, not the state. Our survey shows 9 – 11% want the holidays off this way. If 15% of our population is asking for something, we should listen to them.” She shared other communities’ religious holidays on their school calendars. She said that as elected officials, Committee members are not supposed to represent their own interests. Diane Baum reminded members that they are charged by the state, to judge the impact on finances and families. The quality of learning should this be a day of school, the number of substitute teachers, and amount of supervision - there are many impacts of holding school on these particular religious holidays. She feels it is inappropriate to keep bringing this issue up.

Brigid Bieber feels that it is important that the Committee discuss this as our community continues to change and evolve. She will support Option A with the religious holidays off, in a practical way. She does not want to create more stress for students and families who want to celebrate their religion and require travel. If more people ask for other days to be recognized, then School Committee needs to consider that.

Amy Krishnamurthy would like to see a calendar that has all of the holidays on there. She is uncomfortable with the constant dismissal of the entire community of Asians, Muslims, etc. She would like a truly inclusive calendar. Maya Minkin agrees, and added that the School Committee has to consider “just about anything” that they receive 50 emails on. Kristina Rychlik emphasized that School Committee members have to represent all families. She talked to many families over the summer and wished that some of them had shared their views now as well. She will support Calendar A because it is what the community is asking for at this time.

Paul Murphy views education as an opportunity or a chance to reflect what is happening in the community. Voting a school calendar is just one way that “we can paint our own canvas”. He supports Calendar A because it is part of our community.

Maria Neyland has supported no religious holidays on the school calendar for 9 years as a School Committee member. She is concerned that a message might be being given that our staff is being difficult about accommodating for students celebrating their religious holidays. That is not true. She will vote no on any calendar that has religious holidays on it. She appreciates this conversation by the Committee.

Eileen Zhang has thought about all of these ideas since the last meeting. She emphasized that the Committee serves our whole community and School Committee members need to know the local community. Her family celebrates their new year but the format and way they celebrate it is different. They do not have to take the day off to celebrate. She is also concerned about how many students and teachers will take off those days. She supports Calendar A.

Mary Brolin agreed that these are difficult discussions but it is part of School Committee members’ jobs. She appreciated the respect shown by everyone.

Many members of the public shared their thoughts including concern about:

- The number of teachers and students who would be out, the cost of subs and the small amount of work that would be done are all significant.
- Stress on students and families to take a day off for religious reasons is very difficult. A parent shared her experience when tests and homework were given on the religious holidays. She suggested that the February vacation be eliminated and more religious holidays be given off for those of other faiths.
- One parent wants as few holidays as possible because they are added somewhere else to make up for it. On Diwali, his children dressed in indian clothes and talked about their culture and holiday to the other kids in school. This was a great experience and more of this could be done.
- The Committee is faced with a choice – to celebrate all religious holidays or none, and they should think creatively about how to create a school calendar and embrace diversity.
- A Jewish community member and Kindergarten parent, is concerned about having school on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and the effect that it may have on those who need to be with their families during the day to celebrate the holiday. These holidays fall in the beginning of the school year when benchmarks are created and everyone is getting to know each other, and kids don’t want to be out and miss anything.
- Local Attorney Rosa Hallowell spoke from the audience regarding “Legal Issues Attendant to ABRSD Rescheduling School on Major Religious Holidays”. She stated that there are practical and ethical reasons on both sides, and reminded the School Committee about the First Amendment when “a burden is placed on someone’s freedom”. She suggested that “a change in schedule and policy is subjected to higher constitutional scrutiny than a consistent policy.” She shared her written remarks with the Chair.
- A recent speaker regarding anxiety in our kids advised that predictability and not forcing them into making unnecessary choices is helpful.
- New York City schools give a number of days off for religious holidays in an effort to be more inclusive.

Rabbi Lewis Mintz appreciated the significant thought that so many School Committee members were giving the discussion. In acknowledging religious holiday policy, he emphasized again, that the different holidays are observed in different ways and the nature of the observance is what should be considered. The Committee agreed that other holidays in our diverse community must be acknowledged by including them as a reference on the calendars. This has been done for a number of years by including the state list with the calendar.

Kathleen Neville **moved that the Committee support Draft 1B (holding school on the 2 holidays) for FY18.** Maria Neyland seconded. It was,

**VOTED:** **YES:** Maria Neyland (B), Kathleen Neville (B), Mary Brolin (B)

**NO:** Paul Murphy (A), Diane Baum (A), Deanne O’Sullivan (A), Maya Minkin (A), Eileen Zhang (A), Brigid Bieber (B) and Kristina Rychlik (A)

**ABSTAINED:** Amy Krishnamurthy (A)

The motion FAILED (6 Acton x 2.5 votes = 15 plus one Boxborough = 16 NO.  
3 Boxborough votes = 3 YES.)

Paul Murphy **moved to approve Draft 1A (no school on the 2 holidays)** and Deanne O’Sullivan seconded.

Kathleen Neville moved to amend the motion on the table to: **to add the following as no-school days: Eid al-Adha, which for 2017-2018 doesn't affect the school calendar as it falls over Labor Day weekend; Diwali which falls on Thursday, October 19, 2018; Lunar New Year, Friday, February 16, 2018; Eastern Orthodox Good Friday, Friday, April 6, 2018; and Eid al-Fitr, Friday, June 15, 2018.**

Amy Krishnamurthy seconded the amendment to the motion.

The Committee discussed the amendment. Paul Murphy was willing to accommodate those holidays but was concerned about the start date. Several members liked the idea of being more inclusive, but questioned whether it was coming from the Committee, as opposed to the community. There was concern about how many days would be added and when the last day of school would be. In response to a question of eliminating the April vacation, Marie Altieri stated that this vacation was in the teachers’ contract. Concern also was expressed about the need to confirm the nature and details of each of these religious holidays before committing to them as non school days for next year. The Superintendent asked for time to consider this before voting.

Kathleen Neville agreed to a friendly amendment to her amendment **to delete the words “to add” and insert “to have the Administration consider adding”.** Amy Krishnamurthy seconded.

The Committee discussed how these additional holidays are observed but members were not sure. When told that New York and New Jersey have some of these as non school days, Diane Baum replied that the Committee’s job is to assess the impact in Acton and Boxborough. There was also reference to a list from MA Association of School Committees (MASC).

A member of the public expressed concern that a School Committee member would make this motion without researching the holidays first. Another member appreciated the amendment’s efforts to be inclusive but was frustrated that it appeared “out of the blue”, without knowing the nature of the holidays and how they are observed.

**The VOTE was taken on the amended motion, including the friendly amendment:**

**YES:** Kathleen Neville (B), Maria Neyland (B), Brigid Bieber (B), Paul Murphy (A), Maya Minkin (A), and Amy Krishnamurthy (A)

**NO:** Diane Baum (A), Deanne O’Sullivan (A), Kristina Rychlik (A), Eileen Zhang (A) and Mary Brolin (B)

The amended motion FAILED (4 Acton x 2.5 votes = 10 plus 1 Boxborough = 11 NO  
3 Acton x 2.5 votes = 7.5 plus 3 Boxborough = 10.5 YES)

**The VOTE was taken on the original motion:**

**YES:** Maya Minkin (A), Deanne O’Sullivan (A), Diane Baum (A), Paul Murphy (A), Mary Brolin (B), Kristina Rychlik (A), Brigid Bieber (B) and Eileen Zhang (A)

**NO:** Maria Neyland (B), Kathleen Neville (B) and Amy Krishnamurthy (A)

**The motion to approve Calendar 1A (no school on the two holidays) PASSED.**

(6 Acton x 2.5 votes = 15 plus 2 Boxborough = 17 YES

1 Acton x 2.5 votes = 2.5 plus 2 Boxborough = 4.5 NO)

**The Committee discussed whether or not to change “Columbus Day” to “Indigenous Peoples Day”.**

Kathleen Neville explained her proposal emphasizing that since 1992, this idea has been spreading across the country, including adoption by the cities of Cambridge, Amherst and Northhampton last year to recognize it as a counter-celebration to Columbus Day. Maria Neyland understood why this was proposed, but disagreed. Mary Brolin was in favor because “many times history is taught incorrectly and this is a beginning”. Deanne O’Sullivan noted that her daughter was aware of this movement because the schools are teaching about it.

Corinne Hogseth spoke from the audience asking for a vote against adoption. Stating that “This is not an issue that has come from the community, per the earlier points regarding the school calendar.”, she questioned why it was being discussed by the School Committee. She pointed out that the United Nations has created an Indigenous Day already.

Mary Brolin asked all those **in favor of changing to Indigenous Peoples Day** to say aye.

The Committee **VOTED**

**YES:** Mary Brolin (B), Kathleen Neville (B), Brigid Bieber (B), Paul Murphy (A), Maya Minkin (A) and Amy Krishnamurthy (A)

**NO:** Deanne O’Sullivan (A), Diane Baum (A), Maria Neyland (B) and Eileen Zhang (A)

**ABSTAINED:** Kristina Rychlik

The motion PASSED (YES: 3 Acton x 2.5 votes = 7.5 plus 3 Boxborough = 10.5 votes

NO: 3 Acton x 2.5 votes – 7.5 plus 1 Boxborough = 8.5 votes)

8. **MCAS Report** – *Deborah Bookis, Dawn Bentley*

Due to the late hour, this information will be shared in a memo at the next School Committee meeting.

9. **ABRSD Master Plan Study Update** – *Glenn Brand*

9.1. Master Plan Study Report Community Presentation on 12/8/16

9.1.1. Presentation slides posted at

<http://www.abschools.org/district/school-capital-and-space-planning>

9.2. Final Report – Phase II: ABRSD Master Plan and Feasibility Study, *Dore & Whittier*

9.2.1. Executive Summary 12/8/16

9.3. Memo: Establishment of “District Master Plan Review Committee (DMPRC)”, *an ABRSC Subcommittee* – **VOTE** – *Mary Brolin*

Dr. Brand reported on Dore and Whittier’s presentation to the community on 12/8/16. The list of 15 options for the District’s consideration has been reduced to 5. Mary Brolin reviewed the memo regarding the new DMPRC. Mary offered to chair the group, and Kathleen Neville, Kristina Rychlik and Amy Krishnamurthy offered to be members. Maya Minkin was also interested but given that meetings will be posted and open to the public, she will attend as a non-member. Four parent/guardians have volunteered and they all have great expertise. It was agreed to include all four (Adam Klein, Jack Kline, Matt Mehler and Jon Roland). Leah Lally, Peter Berry, and Jason Cole volunteered as community members. Jr High Principal Andrew Shen would like to participate as well. If there is an invitation into the MSBA, the group would have to expand as a Building Committee.

Paul Murphy moved, Diane Baum seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED:** to approve the members of the DMPRC as proposed.

#### 10. Subcommittee Reports

- 10.1. Budget – 12/7/16 meeting – Maria Neyland (oral)
- 10.2. Policy – First Readings – Brigid Bieber read through the policies for the First Read.
  - 10.2.1. Annual Budget, File: DB
    - 10.2.1.1. Budget – Apportionment of Expenses, File: DB-R (procedures)
  - 10.2.2. Budget Deadlines and Schedules, File: DBC
  - 10.2.3. Food Services: Free and Reduced Price, File: EFC
- 10.3. Outreach (including PTO Co-chairs) – Kristina Rychlik

#### 11. School Committee Member Reports

- 11.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – Amy Krishnamurthy, Paul Murphy
  - 11.1.1. Minutes of 11/10/16 meeting – revised
  - 11.1.2. Materials and Minutes from 12/8/16 meeting
- 11.2. Acton Finance Committee – Amy Krishnamurthy, Deanne O’Sullivan
  - 11.2.1. Point of View - final version

#### 12. Superintendent’s Report/Updates – Glenn Brand

- 12.1. Water Quality Testing Update (oral)
- 12.2. Director of Finance Search Update  
It is expected that the School Committee will vote a new Director at their meeting on 3/2/17.
- 12.3. EDCO Update 12/8/16

#### 13. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

- 13.1. FY18 Kindergarten Registration - Tuesday, **1/10/17** at 7:00 p.m. in the High School Auditorium
- 13.2. [\*Expanding Our Notion of Success\* newsletter](#) , December 2016
- 13.3. Standards Revision – Public Comment Opportunities, 12/1/16 – 2/17/17  
<http://sgiz.mobi/s3/Public-Comment-Draft-ELA-Literacy-Math-Frameworks-2016-2017>
- 13.4. **Family Learning Series Presentations:**
  - 13.4.1. December 14, 2016, 7:00 – 9:00 PM with Presenter: Jessica Minahan  
Topic: **Reducing Anxiety in Students**, RJ Grey Auditorium Audience: Grades PK-12
  - 13.9.2 January 25, 2017, 7:00 – 8:30 PM with Pamela Katz Ressler  
Topic: **Moving from MindFULL to Mindful**, RJ Grey Auditorium Audience: Grades PK-12
- 13.10 Thank you to Lueders Environmental, Inc. for their donation of \$50 for the ABRSD

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda and list of warrants

#### **NEXT MEETINGS:**

- January 12 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted January 6)
- January 21 – ABRSC Budget Saturday Meeting in the Jr High Library (material posted January 13)
- February 2 – Annual Budget Hearing at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted January 27)